

The Little Things

AmeliaKat

Star Wars Prequel Trilogy / Star Wars Original Trilogy

Complete



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AmeliaKat

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Table of Contents

Cover
Title Page
Copyright Information
Table of Contents
Summary
1. Sympathy For The Devil
2. Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood
3. Satisfaction
4. Dance of Desire
5. The One
6. Bitter Sweet Symphony

Summary

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Description:

Desperate to bring Padme back, Darth Vader seeks out a philosopher who takes him through a series of events to learn an important lesson — a message of Chaos Theory

|
A series of One-Shots (In chronological order)

1. Sympathy For The Devil

Sympathy For The Devil

Anakin found himself strolling along the Naboo gardens. The grass, emerald green and aromatic. The clouds vanish into thin streaks and unveil an azure sky. The wild trees dance in the wind and tight buds wait to bloom, cyclical and effortless. Yet the wildflowers are never quite as freeing or as sensual as the young woman in yellow.

Padme sits on a picnic blanket, the golden hem of her summer dress creates a circular shape, origami-like folds of hope. She looks up at him, bright-eyed. A smile enchants with such innocence. She is where peace awaits for the broken — to heal them, nurture them... She is where light rises and darkness rests.

She embraces him in her arms as soon as he sits beside her. Her hands cradle his face. It is easy to become swept away by the flexibility of her fingers as she comforts him. Her warmth doesn't diminish as her lips press against his. But the kiss doesn't last long. He wished he could remain distracted by her ripe lips but his eyes quickly fall, unable to rid himself of a persistent fear stirring within.

"I had an awful dream." He murmurs, looking into her deep brown eyes. "You died in childbirth, I was all burned up. . .stuck in some metal suit. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't get out."

Padme tilts her head to the side in a dream-like state, affectionately offering gentle words of solace. "It was only a dream." She pushes his hair back, away from his eyes, and smiles. Her mouth drew his back to hers. Each kiss deluged with the sweetness of freedom. Fear melts away.

He protrudes forward, laying her down on the blanket as he slumps his body over hers. Her hands travel down his virile back, keeping him close while he rests his forehead on hers, separated only by her embroidered headband. His hands explore down to her waist, relishing the smoothness of her tulle shawl.

"Why didn't you stay?" She asks in between kisses.

He cranes his head back, caught off guard. "What?"

"Why didn't you stay in the Council Chamber?" The monotony of her tone was as puzzling as the question. Anakin's brows furrowed, growing more and more concerned as she squirms underneath him. He looks down, noticing a baby bump growing rapidly in real-time. He quickly scoots off her, trying to make sense of what was happening. Deafened by the sound of his heavy exhales, he calls her name over and over again, failing to console her as she begins to scream.

Once the sound escapes her mouth, only silence hangs between them. His nervous eyes scan her as he whimpers, “Padme... Padme!” Urging her to answer, sweat prickled his skin as he falls victim to a rising panic.

Her eyes were now closed; her heart, along with her growing baby bump, stops, and he watches as her body turns cold — an all too familiar temperature.

He has been forced to be subservient to the seasons of life. It was pointless to rebel. Temperatures don’t change anymore. Whether you chase the warmth of the suns or feel the pull of the moon, for Darth Vader, it is always cold here.

For only a man who has been burned a thousand times can become immune to the heat.

*Please allow me to introduce myself
I’m a man of wealth and taste
I’ve been around for a long, long year
Stole many a man’s soul and faith*

Lord Vader stared up at the night sky, watching the stars form an alliance. It is only when he looks at the stars that he allows himself to remember his nightmares — nightmares that spook him in new, creative ways every time he closes his eyes. It is one of the few quiet moments where he lets Anakin ponder.

Vader turned back around to face the man tied to a chair. He reached over and removed the restraint device over the prisoner’s mouth.

“Sir Phren.” The Dark Lord’s haunting breathing didn’t frighten the man in elegant royal blue robes. “I’m sorry we had to go to such lengths to get you here.”

“That’s a fancy way of saying *kidnap*.”

Vader smirked under his metal mask. “...I know you can help me.”

“I told you before, Lord Vader,” Phren shrugged. “You can’t mess with fate.”

“*You* did.”

“That was a mistake.” The man warned while his handcuffed wrists dangled. “I learned the hard way.”

Vader paced around the dark greyish room. Each step he took was slow, orderly... intentional. “Quite a few years ago, I lost someone close to me. . .and I would do anything to get her back.”

Phren observed the Sith with attentive eyes, knowing of his wily nature. One should always pay attention to the subtleties of Darth Vader when he is calm — because his attacks are anything but.

“Are you expecting sympathy?” Phren couldn’t help but scoff at Vader’s pensiveness. Even when he’s still and quiet, the Dark Lord exudes aggression and unpredictability.

“Sympathy is just a fancy word for *pity*.” Vader remarked.

Phren started to feel uneasy as Vader’s dark lenses aimed at him. His stares were sharp, debilitating even... There was something frightful about the inability to look into a man’s eyes and gauge what he’s thinking, especially a man who was known to take a life for the slightest inconvenience.

“I won’t do it.” Phren’s words echoed the instability of the environment; a shaky tone possessed each syllable.

Vader shook his head callously. “What a waste of power.”

“What you’re asking for is an abuse of power.” Phren shot back. “You go back, change one little thing, oblivious to the larger effect it may have, and you’ll be thrust into chaos. The Force will ensure you suffer the consequences until you learn your lesson.”

“I’m not asking. I’m telling.” Vader raised a finger, telekinetically sliding a crystal bowl across the table in front of Phren. “I believe this is yours.”

Phren glanced down at his own belongings and sighed. He felt cornered. His stomach twisted at the mere thought of impiety. Even the air around him felt corrupted. Phren politely refused to take part nor was he willing to be coerced into doing the inconceivable. It was sacrilegious. “You can’t cheat death. And you can’t cheat life.”

Vader lifted his gloved hand as two of his fingers slowly swirled in a circular motion. Sir Phren felt a tightness grip his throat. He could feel the Sith’s fingers pressuring his neck through a force-choke.

Vader watched Phren fail to fight the suffocation and finally released him. Led through a series of coughs, the man’s head sank, gasping for air. Eventually, he looked up at Vader, who remained unruffled. His soul empty, as if surrounded by tumbleweeds — bored and unimpressed by the bleakness of his view. Not a shred of mercy.

“You’ll find I always get what I want. One way or another.” Vader’s lenses landed on the crystal bowl once more, signaling to Phren that time was running out. “Do it.”

A reluctant Phren placed his chained hands over the crystal bowl and a kaleidoscope of plasma blue light paints in flakes. He gestured for Vader to place his patent leather glove inside the bowl. Sparks fly and envelope his hand.

*So if you meet me, have some courtesy
Have some sympathy, and some taste
Use all your well-learned politesse
Or I'll lay your soul to waste*

Anakin’s head spun around, skimming over the lava-covered mountains from inside the factory. Anakin remembered the days when Mustafar looked desolate. A memory opened, in more ways than one. He looked down and saw that he was wearing his old Jedi robes — a

black leather tabard over a loose-fitting garment. He lifted up his left hand, reveling in the ability to touch finger to thumb and feel his own humanity. He turned to his right metal hand and even that put a smile on his face. He then stroked the scar across his right eyebrow, nostalgic for this day in history when the map of Vader's future charred skin had been erased.

The sound of his own inhaled was musical — the art of taking a breath without difficulty had been lost on him. He felt his chest had opened out to the heavens. Even the smoky air didn't bother him. It actually made him feel more alive. He could feel the wind in his hair again, smell the evocative scents that swarmed the flanks of the volcano. More significantly, he could see with his own clear, ancient eyes, the lava river, fiery red. A color so bold it made him pray he appreciated his sight no longer entombed by a dark, narrow helmet.

He caught a glimpse of the elegant silver design of the Naboo star skiff through the window.

Padme.

He rushed out. His spirit arriving before he did.

She fell into his arms hopelessly. Her face taut with grief as she struggled to balance worry and relief simultaneously.

"It's you!" His emphatic whispers fog the little space between them as he held her in his arms, slipping his fingers under her hair strands that were pulled into a tight braid. Feeling the softness of her hair and the smooth texture of her flesh at the tip of his fingers carried him back to wondrous times. Wild, fairytale-like moments of peace and pleasure return to him. Breathing her in now felt as good as it did back then. An excruciating reminder of what it felt like to be loved and revered by the woman he lost.

"What's going on?" Padme's tone displayed her ambivalence.

"I'll explain everything." He hurriedly looked around, cautiously aware of events yet to transpire. "But first, we gotta get out of here."

"What?" Padme couldn't wrap her head around why he was so antsy. She had so many unanswered questions, longing for resolution. But before she could even think, he grabbed her hand and took her through the volcanic wasteland.

"Come on." He encouraged. There were no colours anymore as they brushed past the scenery, no vibrancy. And the faster he dragged her to his ship, the blurrier the view.

"Anakin, my ship is over there!" She insisted to no avail. Everything surrounding them fizzled out into shades of auburn.

"Where are we going?" She demanded as he maneuvered the ship through the air.

"To Naboo. Just like you wanted." His attempt to sound reassuring fell short.

Padme studied him. She could feel the distance between them. There was a coldness, a discomfort, a flame desperately flickering to avoid dying out. And suddenly, it clicked. Her eyes now downcast as she invites in fragments of the glaring truth.

“You did it, didn’t you?” Despite its faint pitch, a heavy undertone carried her wispy voice.

“What?” Anakin’s forehead crinkled as he fidgeted in his seat dismissively. He could feel Padme’s scrutiny as he tried to remain nonchalant.

“Obi-Wan was right.” She said with a heavy heart.

“Obi-Wan doesn’t know what he’s talking about.” He quickly grumbled. Still not looking at her.

She observed him again, leaning forward in her chair. “You’re running away.” She realized. “You’re running away from him.”

“No!” He snapped.

Anakin finally turned to face her and she could see in his eyes, a young man desperately searching for clarity and control. “I’m running away from myself.” His voice erratic as he continued, “I’ve seen the future, I — I was there.”

Padme watched him stumble over his own reality. “Is this about your dreams again?”

“No.” The way he answered her sounded like a warning. “I saw... I saw what I’m capable of.” He looked ahead into the pitch black abyss, his eyes fixed on the emptiness in front of him, hoping it would suck out his strangling thoughts. It was as though she could see his mind juggling them underneath a face contorted with uncertainty. This was not the face of a man with nothing to hide.

“You’re behind the attack on the Jedi temple, aren’t you?” Calm on the outside, shaking on the inside, she wasn’t as ready for a confession as she thought. She felt her own fear paralyze her — the fear of having to let go of the outcome.

It didn’t help that there was a screaming tension between them, making it hard to think straight. But the longer he was quiet, the harder it was for her to deny.

“Y—you killed them.” She stammered, agony tearing at her insides. She placed her hand over her pregnant belly, closing her eyes to self-soothe but she quickly became crippled by cramps.

“We need to land.” She pressed as insecurity, stress and pain puncture her in sequence. She knows the baby is coming. Only her thoughts are granted a remissive state as she is weighed down by the tropic of labour pain.

“Just breathe. We’re almost there.” His nervous words rolled out. Looking over, the pallor of her skin and burdened eyes distill the intensity of the situation. The residue of the past sinks in fully, frightening him further.

“Now!” She yelled. And the once delicious senses he felt, senses of rebirth, the titillation of love, and the innate togetherness that perfumes a warm room, are frozen. He cannot think, he cannot land, he can’t accept the possibility of history repeating itself.

“My love, I swear, we won’t be long!” He urged, exposing his agitation.

She tried to grab onto the back of his seat and fell to the floor, along with his ego and denial. She lies on the floor, the stress had become physical, a shadow over her strength, a

contortion. His heart lurched at the sight of her, pulling her back up.

He observed the interface, and quickly steered the ship back, realizing the closest planetoid to Mustafar is Polis Massa. Managing to get Padme back into her seat, he tried to keep her calm but steam was coming out of her ears.

“I need to get off the ship!” She wailed, tugging at his arm, exasperated.

She knocked his hand, making him lose control of the ship. As the spacecraft sped up, their screams eclipse each other’s. He grabs the controls while she claws at him, hysterical from raw pain, leading them to crash into the the layer of rocks in the asteroid.

Anakin carried Padme into the medical facility, calling for help as she cradled her stomach in pain. Droids appeared before him with a gurney, and he watched hopelessly as his wife was taken away.

He waited for what felt like hours upon hours, pacing around the room like a caged animal. The lines were so blurred between reality and nightmare. To clutch onto faith was distasteful at this point. It didn’t feel right. This is not repairing the past, it only rattles equilibrium, a distorted ideal, a dream unsettled. He was supposed to come here to save her, to restore hope, fulfill an instinctive longing.

His shoulders stiffened when a medical droid approached him.

“The Senator is recovering.” The robotic voice sank in.

He brushed his hair back, finally remembering to take a breath — or, rather, he finally allowed himself to release some of the pressure off his chest. “And the baby?”

The droid’s arms hung dreadfully at its sides. “...I’m sorry.”

A clinging guilt sticks to his flesh, a flesh he now wishes did burn off. He didn’t think about the consequences for an unborn life when he embarked on this journey.

He didn’t know the baby. The thought of the baby represented a future he idolized but it did not ferment a familiarity. His wife, however, felt the baby close to her everyday. Her heart, her mind, her body was woven into this soulful connection. She not only knew the very essence of the baby, they were one.

Anakin became quiet, trying to develop his own criterion in which to place this feeling. A burial, a memoir, it didn’t matter where he stored the heartache. Everything will change when he sees Padme. Either way their relationship is stifled and he recognizes that. In this moment, he must become brutally honest with himself. He must open up before he can commemorate. First to acknowledge and then to accept that when they lay the baby to rest, a part of Padme will die with it.

But, for now, he takes some comfort in the fact that she is at least *alive*.

“Hey...” Anakin peered through the door, checking on Padme.

She lied on the bed as though her body had become one with it. Her face was awash with grief. A descent of awareness as her surroundings drop from her memory. They shrivel up and she closes her eyes to let them go willingly. But his presence hovering over her kept her awake.

“It was a boy.” She muttered, practically to herself.

“I heard.” He sat beside her on the bed. His knuckles softly grazed her cheek in tender rhythms.

“He had your eyes. . .and a birth mark on his side.” Her glazed-over eyes pictured the silent image of her baby, looking peaceful as if he was simply asleep. It brought her to tears — tears she quickly shuffled to the back of her mind. “The doctor said it was his twin from another lifetime.”

Anakin’s head drooped. “I’m so sorry, Padme.”

A tear streamed down his cheek, evoking her own to finally fall. He bent down to kiss her forehead, wanting to be close to her, to seek refuge in one another. His hand brushes her hair out of her eyes, sharing in remorse, embracing defeat. He longed to take away her pain in the hope that she’d return the favour. She succumbed to his touch as she wept.

Feeling responsible for her frailty, he traced kisses down her cheeks, wanting to combine his soul with hers to feel whole. His lips brushed against hers and, for a moment, she is submissive to his fervor and repentance. Until his tongue enters her mouth, demanding closeness with a desperation that reminds her just how far apart they really are.

“No.” She turned away from him, leaving his lips unsated.

A rush of anxiety floods his features as his eyes searched hers, dreading the separation of an impassioned touch.

“Tell me the truth.” She pleaded. Her eyes, her soul, no longer the embodiment of tremendous rapture for life but the death of it now. Dark clouds pull at her eyelids, she can barely find the courage to reveal one last broken prayer. “Just. . .tell me the truth.”

With his hands lingering either side of her, she could feel the trepidation he tried to camouflage. She watched his mouth intently, wondering whether he would give her relief or surrender whatever demons flowed through him. But she clung onto one last beacon of hope, that the darkness he struggled with had no correlation to the darkness of this night. This fall from grace was strictly a war of the mind.

“Did you kill them?” Her voice was stern, hiding her weakness as she folds all her cards in search of one last shard of honesty. Her body was giving up but she mustered all the strength she could to speak clearly. No cracks, no stutter, no uneven cadence. But the answer was no answer at all. His face warped with desolation, soft eyes looking for their place in a hardened, icy reality. The silence compelled her to see the dust has settled. No winds of emotion can torpedo the truth.

She closed her eyes, giving into the tears that threatened her. “Even the children...?” She could barely stomach the words that left her mouth.

“Padme—” He implored her to look at him, trying to swim against the waves of rejection, abandonment, the severing of connection. But she shook her head hopelessly and got out the other side of the bed.

“You took the life of a child. . .while I was carrying yours.” She sobbed, disgust crinkling the corners of her eyes. She places a hand over her heart squirming in her chest. “And then you came home right after and kissed me and touched me like nothing happened!”

“Just let me explain.” He got up and ran to her side. His hands begging for atonement as they gather her.

She wriggled out of his arms. Her voice quivering with confused despair, “I need you to leave.”

“Padme, come on.” He pleaded with urgency, reaching for her again.

“No!” She shoved him off, “Either you leave or I will.”

“Padme, you can’t—”

He chased her to the door. She looked down as he plastered his hand onto hers once it landed on the door handle.

“Let go of me!” She yelled as he spun her around to face him. His fingers tightly grip her shoulders, not knowing his own strength in moments of desperation. She cried out, her body twisting in sinuous motions in an attempt to break free. The room, the floor they stood on, the air between them, all echo the screams of perpetual failure. Pain and sadness are doomed to prevail. Deceit, treachery is all they have been reduced to. She mourns for the life of her child, a shattered future, an innocence corrupted, and the person responsible, her lover.

There is no direction left to follow, both sides of the blade are sharp points, she is stabbed invariably.

“Padme, listen to me!” He said forcefully. His adamance to deny the severity of his actions made her certain that they cannot wind up on the same side of the door and expect to find peace. With all her might, she escaped his violent clutches but the sheer momentum she evoked to do so resulted in her lunging towards the bedside table. Her head hit the sharp corner and her body was thrown to the floor.

Anakin panicked, rushing over to her. He lifted up her head and gasped in terror at his hand now covered in her blood.

Nurses and doctors rush in, the chatter in and out of his head is deafening. It is so loud, it has become silent. He is screaming at them as they pry Padme out of his arms. It was all a big, destructive blur and he became numb. He feels hands on him, stretching his clothes, picking him up from the floor. He despises the lack of clarity. Imagination is cruel—or is it reality?

His head now rests on a gurney. He can barely lift it up. *What have they done to me?* He looks down at his hands, rattling the restraints on his wrists.

What is happening?!

“What the hell was that?” Vader roared, sitting across from Sir Phren, hyperventilating. His sinister breaths, smoky drawn out rasps.

“Fate.” The philosopher interlaced his tied hands as they rest on his knees. “She still dies. . .by your hand... And you still end up a prisoner. That is until the Emperor bails you out. But, nevertheless, a prisoner.”

“Well, go back and fix it!”

“You asked to come back. Perhaps you now see the danger of manipulating the Force.”

Vader lunged across the table, his metal hand wrapped around Phren’s neck. “Listen here. We don’t have time for you to cry over the debauching of your morality. Now help me find a way to bring her back alive.”

“Why?” Phren wheezed, a cacophony of croaks, until Vader released him. Steadying his breath, Phren bit back, “Why would you want to? She doesn’t want you to! I witnessed the same scenario as you. She won’t forgive your crimes.”

Vader sneered, “Bold of you to speak to me like that.”

“Threats of death don’t scare me, *my Lord*.” The way he spoke of Vader’s title, a mockery to some. But Vader liked witnessing a man with a daring boldness in his eyes, an audacity. It was a refreshing change from those who carry all their shame, inferiority, and fear on their backs, waiting for Vader to put them out of their misery.

“I know. And I don’t want you dead.” Vader leaned back in his chair. His tone, now, relaxed, omniscient, a mystery. “But I can make you wish you were.”

“Alright.” Phren accepted, knowing there was no two ways about it. His volition is dominated until Vader has no further use for him. You didn’t have to know Vader personally to know there’s a culture to adhere to if you are taken in by the Empire. If you want his respect or clemency, don’t expect it to be sequential, gradual, or chronological. It can take days, twists and turns... and it may never come. Vader could smell fear and desperation — *it takes one to know one*.

“It is not *where* you go on your journey to save her, it is *who* goes.” Phren informed, aiming his bow and arrow of resilience right at Vader, determined to never buckle under — even if he has to perform an unsavory act in exchange for his freedom. He may have to do what the Sith asks but he doesn’t have to like it. And he will not bury his pride or his beliefs — in hopes that the Force will grant him salvation. “*You* are selfish. And your selfishness is no longer rational. Your hedonistic existence has taken over your quest for pure love. You want what you want whether it’s good for the people you love or not. In both your dreams and reality, you have proven that you’d rather her be *dead* than leave you.”

Vader had almost forgotten that Phren had a gift. The philosopher could read the signs, the symbols, the motifs behind everyone’s suffering, enthusiasm, and interests. He divulges constellations, using your layers, cells, and pain to discover your deepest desires, a crusade to rescue you. But what Vader was asking of him was far from an innocent force power.

“I’m doing this *for* her.” Vader stated clearly, slowly.

Phren’s eyes squinted, fettered by a sea of confusion. “You really believe that...”

And the philosopher couldn’t help but chuckle. It was depressingly poetic. “My sympathies.”

*Pleased to meet you, hope you guessed my name
But what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game*

Sympathy For The Devil — The Rolling Stones

2. Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood

(Don't Let Me Be) Misunderstood

*Baby, do you understand me now
Sometimes I feel a little mad
But don't you know that no one alive
Can always be an angel
When things go wrong I seem to be bad*

Darth Vader entered the prison cell in which he kept the philosopher. Phren was fiddling with the automated tools that included a food dispenser and retractable toothbrush — the latter seemingly jammed.

“It’s stuck.” Phren voiced with a struggle.

“Let me see.” Vader crouched down, shoving Phren out of the way.

Pushed aside, Phren rubbed the rough texture of his hands together, massaging them after a failed DIY attempt. He observed the Sith working away. “Thought you would send someone in to fix that.” He rarely saw powerful leaders engage in labor.

“I don’t pay anyone to do what I can do myself.” Vader tested the service and, low and behold, the toothbrush was retrieved. “If you have to send someone to kill a man, you shouldn’t be killing anyone.”

Phren folded his arms as Vader’s red lenses struck him with a lucid confidence. “You like to fix things.”

“I fix things.” Vader agreed.

Phren plopped himself on the bed behind him, watching the Dark Lord with thoughtful eyes. “Gives you a sense of control.”

Vader stiffened as though the philosopher had found his triggers. Phren took in the harsh physicality of Vader as it was paired with a synthetic voice, “I have control.”

“Do you?” Phren questioned, albeit treading carefully around Vader, knowing he could evoke a reaction, an eccentricity Vader might unleash at any given time. But he wasn’t about to lower his defenses. Resolutions are difficult to achieve but in order for his words to resonate with Vader, he couldn’t tiptoe around criticism. “This trip down memory lane proves the opposite. I’d say, you’re terrified of losing control. But it is only when we accept what we can’t control do we find the stability we’re looking for.”

Vader snickered. “Only a mere mortal man puts limitations on his power. I died in a fire and came back to life. I am superior to man.”

“You’re right. You’re not a man. Because a man knows that his power does not come from exerting it over others. A true measure of a man’s strength is his discipline. And you can’t let go.”

Phren’s steady eyes line up with Vader’s, and although he cannot see behind the mask, he knows a thousand scars hide behind it, each with a secret, character, and language. Vader may have been able to fool most of the mortals he encountered, but Phren sensed the transparencies of his motives, surprised by how eerily close to the surface they were. It was also clear Vader detested the fact that he failed to bury them further.

The sheer contents within the crystal bowl on Phren’s nightstand began to stir, shimmering, swirling around like turquoise liquid clouds. Phren’s eyes remained firmly on Vader as he glanced inside the bowl.

“Your anxiety and desire for power stems from your inability to fix the past.”

Young Anakin worked on repairing a new droid. He dedicated himself to understanding the mechanics of the equipment sent over — it was a great distraction. He hoped it would drown out the noise in the other room. He could hear Watto and his mother arguing. Shmi’s voice sows deep with its softness so she attempts to appeal to a more charitable side of Watto. Even if he hadn’t shown much of it, Shmi was never one to accept the breaking of spirit.

Anakin knew what the fight was about. Shmi didn’t want her son partaking in dangerous pod races. His mother’s plea quickly perishes, lost in translation, diminishing under Watto’s heavy air of haughtiness.

Anakin can’t bear to hear it anymore, knowing that the last time he interfered, he only made things worse. The only thing more painful than enduring abuse is watching what it does to your mother. Shmi warned him about getting involved, encouraging him to pick his battles. It seemed like an unfairly sacrificial act. Why did he have to choose? Why couldn’t he resolve everything? Why are some seasons of hope left in the dust?

He waits for the cold disturbance to leave so he and his mother can lock it out, sweep away the remains of reality and pretend the temperature of their home is in their control. But after a shrill cry travels over to where he sat, he popped his head around the corner.

The picture before him is told in between the lines of movement. Watto storms out and Shmi runs to the kitchen — with Anakin filling in the blanks. He learned to be an observer, a curious sponge, hypervigilant to the senses around him — an alertness not many kids his age had. *A gift and a curse*. His ability was overtly aggressive at times and physically painful, a piercing of the skin occurs when those he cares for are in danger.

He is quick to leap to anger, no matter how many times his mother discourages it. Easily triggered, he struggles with a tendency to fight when he cannot distract himself with fixing up junk, an activity that gives him a sense of control in situations he had no control over... *a placebo effect*. He is substantial, effective, productive when he repairs any kind of damage.

He watches his mother rush to wrap gauze around her hand. Layers upon layers. Anakin huffs, carving out the details in his mind, numbing, because he knows no amount of layers will erase them.

His impetus is always at the forefront; reason comes second as he runs over to her, demanding answers. “What’s going on?”

Shmi jumps up in a fright, accidentally knocking a glass as Anakin startles her. The glass smashes into pieces and she quickly runs to his aid, making sure the shards didn’t cut him. She gathers it up, scraping her bandaged hand in the process. The floor claimed Anakin’s feet, he couldn’t move away. He stood there, staring at the light reflecting off the glass, resentment boiling over.

“What was all that about?” Anakin pressed.

Shmi sits on the floor beside the accumulated debris and takes a breath. Her instinct to bury darkness away from her son came from a loving place. She believed that the only way to ensure Anakin survives the harshness of his early years is to have him believe in the good. And sometimes, in cases like these, she wished she could slip one by.

“Don’t worry about it.” She affected a compassionate tone. But the imagery scratched his skin like the roughness of sand clinging to him after a day of scrubbing metal in the scorching heat. She got up with the intention of returning to normalcy but the look on her son’s face said it all. He was morose, tired of feeling insignificant and, most importantly, he could see through her smoke screens.

“You worry too much, Ani.” Her thumb strokes his cheek, wanting to preserve what was rosy with idealism.

He knows in his heart that her eyes and words don’t blend well together but he smiles anyway, hoping it helps her fade certain memories away.

She ruffles his hair before getting back to her duties in the kitchen. Anakin’s lips quickly form into a thin unyielding line as he glances down at his own reflection in the shattered glass. Behind him, he spots a young man with a braid morphing into a seasoned war hero, his hair falling in waves down his neck, and then the tangible image evolves into a tall, dark, masked figure, the embodiment of his future self — *from man to machine*.

Darth Vader observes his 8 year old self — the dirty blonde hair falling along his forehead, the flashing blue sharpness in his eyes, squinting like he had been staring at the twin suns for too long, and his stiff lips that tell a story, a story of one who bit his tongue far too often. Vader’s gaze was interrupted by the wise voice of Sir Phren.

“You know what it’s like, don’t you? To feel helpless.”

“What are you doing here?” Vader groaned, which Phren ignored.

“You watched your mother endure pain from those who claimed to be superior. And you couldn’t do anything about it. You had to watch.” Phren glided over to the counter where Shmi was preparing food, oblivious to the souls from another dimension. “You couldn’t protect her. And you prayed for the days you’d grow strong enough to do so.”

Vader saw his mother and hurried over. Standing behind her, he rested his hand on her shoulder but she couldn't feel him. His hand lingers a little longer, closing his eyes behind his helmet, calling upon every fibre of the Force to be able to feel his mother's presence one more time.

"And then once you gained power, anyone who held you back from what you deemed as progress became your enemy. Slavers, the Jedi. . .yourself." Phren continued to examine Vader, who was adamant about blocking him out.

Vader turned back to his former child self with a wounded fortitude. "I will fix this."

Phren sighed, his hand flails about as if to brush off air. "Go ahead. Keep trying. But I want to remind you, your need to control everything is your undoing. You know deep down, you've always known. . .*you can't stop the change.*"

"That's enough." Vader warned curtly. And Phren and he fizzle out into thin air.

Vader found himself back in the cell opposite Phren. His blood thickening, muscles tensing, and his breathing, thunderous. "From now on, *I* say where we go." He roared.

"You yearn for a power you should not possess. No matter your intentions, the more you gain, the more you'll want. You know this better than anyone."

Vader raised his hand, and Phren felt invisible fingertips dig into his neck. Through the force, Vader gradually lifted the man off the ground... like a paint roller forging the path up along the wall.

Phren's legs writhed about, his hands pawing at his neck to free himself. It is isolating waiting for death, for the deprivation of air to finally grant you the long sleep. Every dream you have ever had races to the front of your mind and becomes a mirror; how you lived is questioned with magnifying eyes. Fiercely? Well-intentioned? Shamelessly? Cowardly? Your heart draws your anecdotes, the painful, the gratifying — you go through every sheet of memory with a fine-tooth comb, wondering whether your time has come as a blessing or a disappointment to your legacy.

Phren closes his eyes, letting the spirit of the Force take him.

Until Vader tosses him, a violent thrash, beside his bed.

Phren's arms crawl onto the mattress to lift himself up, coughing, absorbing all the air he can.

"Your opinion will be solicited when needed." Vader stretches his words out, coating them with an almost vandalistic instinct that pleased him. "Don't get too big for your boots."

Phren pulls himself up onto the bed fully, he breathes in tumultuous rhythms, unable to pick his eyes up from the floor. He couldn't process it — how dangerously Vader played with death, a risk taker in every way. And he realized it wasn't how violent the man in the black suit could be that made him scary, it was how he combined elements, cruel and calm, and made their relationship one of symbiosis.

Phren's mind scurried through sequences, possibilities, endless tragedies and happy endings, realizing he has to find a new way to fight back.

"I am aware that I can't stand in your way." Phren accepted with strict vehemence. "But I have a power you don't, one you won't. *Inner peace.*"

Vader used the force to snatch the crystal bowl and with a feral throw, hurled it at Phren.

The bowl landed in his lap, hitting his stomach, causing him to groan. But Phren did as he was instructed.

The crystal light begins to take shape, a kinetic energy. Vader strides over, ready to immerse himself in a hypnotic unraveling of the past.

*Baby, sometimes I'm so carefree
With a joy that's hard to hide
And sometimes it seems that all I have do is worry
And then you're bound to see my other side*

Anakin stood before the Jedi Council, remembering his goals the first time he stood here. He was so close to finding a way to save Padme, and, now, if he can achieve it, he'd be able to go back in time and save his mother too. With his hands tucked in the sleeves of his cloak, Anakin's eyes bounced along the panoramic view, chair after chair, a perimeter of red and beige staples, a focal point of richness.

"You are on this council." Mace Windu confirmed. "But we do not grant you the rank of Master."

Anakin took a deep breath — one not of frustration but exhaustion. He features awash with apathy, drained by propriety.

So he scratched his head and took a casual step back, decorum had been replaced by indifference. "I'm married." He sighed lazily.

"Anakin—" Obi-Wan quickly interjected but Anakin paid him no mind.

"—No it's true." Anakin shushed him with a haphazard wave of his hand. "I married Senator Amidala three years ago. And," He merged his cavalier attitude with unenthused words, stretching his arms back as though he had just woken up. "—now she's pregnant with my kid."

The room was quiet — Anakin didn't know whether they were utterly disappointed or couldn't care less.

"And she's dying." He continued. He buried his hands back in his robes — this time, setting his eyes firmly on a stoic Yoda and Mace. "And you have the power to save her. . .and you won't give it to me."

"What you ask for, unnatural it is." Yoda expressed his sympathies. "Up to us, it is not."

“Like hell it isn’t!” Anakin snapped. Tension filled the chamber like a violent flood.

“Take a seat, young Skywalker.” Mace warned, each consonant dripping with disdain. Tired of Anakin’s disrespect for authority.

Instead of taking a seat, Anakin stormed out.

Anakin arrived on the landing deck of Padme’s apartment. Putting his issues with the Jedi aside, he was going to focus on her and sort it out himself.

There she is. Rushing over to him, she wore a beaded dark-blue dress that brought out her magnetic brown eyes. Her hair, sultry ringlets and her cheeks suffused with soft pink. Her lips tender to the touch as she plasters them onto his. For a moment, everything is right in the world. Flames of intimacy, conversations, dreams and smiles rush back to him, lighting up a candle in his heart with long lost pieces of the soul... a scrapbook of memories.

His ragged breaths stain her lips as he steals kisses. Kisses that were hopeful and reckless. Their hearts are open and they can’t resist pushing everything else to a corner, letting it all get sucked into an imagination that no longer concerned them. Her fingers entwine in his hair, in the only reality they need to know about.

She brushes the tip of her nose against his, her refreshing hands lave along his jaw as she whispers into his mouth, “You okay?”

He leans his cheek in the warmth of her palm before planting a kiss in the centre. His soothing voice muffled in the palm of her hand, “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Obi-Wan told me what happened with the council.”

Cold air fills the gap as he jerks his head back. “Obi-Wan was here?”

“Yeah, he came to check on you.”

Anakin walks past her into the apartment, hands on his hips, lost in thought. Padme watched him with curiosity, wary of his change in demeanor.

Finally, he turns back to her, a dark flicker in his eyes. “Why would he come *here*?” His face colored with dread, remembering a loose thread of the past. *Is she on his side?*

“What do you mean?” Padme couldn’t detect what he was thinking.

“Why would he come to *you*, Padme?” This was something he hadn’t thought through. A shadow over his plans. Padme had plotted with Obi-Wan before. He couldn’t let that happen again.

Folding her arms, a steely eyed Padme was insulted by the hidden implication. “What are you trying to say?”

Anakin made his way back towards her, taking in the cold breeze she fired at him and perpetuated it, amplifying it with his brazen words. “I’m saying, why would he come to my wife behind my back.”

Padme fought the urge to roll her eyes. “Oh Anakin you worry way too much.” She turned on her heel, in no mood to feed into his paranoia. But her walking away caused a storm to flash over his features.

He grabbed her arm before she could walk off. “Tell me what he said.”

Padme blinked, her eyes adjusting to the sudden contact and to the predatory eyes now so close they blocked her view. “Let go of me.”

“I’ll let go when you tell me what he said.” Anakin drawled, slowly, rhythmically.

Padme gasped, her forehead crinkling in bewilderment. Anakin knew that look in her eyes, a cold gaze wanting to recover his innocence. He had seen it on Mustafar. But he wasn’t about to let what anyone thought of him get in the way of his goal. Sometimes you have to twist, steal, and fight your way through. “He’s trying to turn you against me.”

“You. . . have lost it.” She shook her head in frightened amazement.

“Maybe. But I’m right.” His eyes locked on her like magnets. She felt a dim haze pull over her eyes, like she was struggling for clarity. What got him so skeptical? So determined in his distrust?

She started to tremble, fearing how far his motivations would take him. “Look I know with your dreams and everything lately, you’re under a lot of stress. But don’t take it out on me.” She willed her fingers to remain steadfast.

“Take it out on you?” He scoffed. “Everything I’m doing is for you!”

“For me?” Her eyebrows arched and she retrieved her arm from his tight grip. “Tell me, were you thinking about me when you decided to come clean to the council? How it would affect my reputation, my career? You didn’t even think to run it by me...”

“...Guess that’s another thing you and Obi-Wan can talk about.” The rancorous stares, the sharpened words — she had enough. She felt shaken, pierced through, and crushed by the heavy weight of his fury, insecurities, and hubris.

Weakening under the responsibility of dragging him out of his self-dug grave, she put her foot down. “Oh Anakin snap out of it!”

Their heavy exhales are cut against each other’s, and the fluctuating current between them made him have to face her imploring eyes. She felt hopeless, wanting to leave her own flesh and return when the storm passes. It was excruciating trying to save him from drowning in his own panic.

And it hit him. He somehow kept blocking her out every time he built fences to protect her.

He lowered his head, fed up with the mismanaging of emotions, the stumbling down deserted lanes that fail to make his journey worth it. *The road to hell is paved with good intentions* — and his hard work, his perfectionism seemed to carry him to ventures that grow more and more self-serving — yet not even he is satisfied.

“I’m trying...” He confesses as he moves through the living room, falling onto the couch. “I’m trying to get it right.”

Padme shares in his overexertion and it is tiresome. The arguing, the fear, the constant reminder of their obstacles took a toll. They had made decisions based on an overwhelming desire, a loving impulse with no thought of how to combine two contrasting lives with one all-consuming dream. But when it isn't a burden, it is the most exhilarating fantasy come to life.

"I know." She said eventually, joining him on the couch. "But you expect too much of yourself. You shouldn't worry this much. You have got to control your thoughts; your thoughts don't control *you*."

He feels a sting as she utters those words. Her tone deeper, resolute, as if it were mixed with another sound. Something didn't add up. He tilts his head to the side, hesitantly, and before him is not the grace and kindness of his wife's delicate features but the critical eyes of Obi-Wan.

A threatening dragon-like fire burns in his soul as his eyes take in his old Master. The hatred, the instability, and bitterness are stirred until the breaking point. An eruption about to take place, reminding him of the part Obi-Wan played in the distance between him and his wife.

Provoked by the red mist that begins to swirl around him, his eyes like lightning, his body feels the pending explosion, the ticking-time bomb pushing through his veins. The intensity of revenge, the obsession of the mind, his caprices, whims, everything that he remained a slave to began to boil over... and the blinding red glare turned black...

*If I seem edgy I want you to know
That I never mean to take it out on you
Life has its problems and I get my share
And that's one thing I never meant to do*

*Because I love you, baby don't you know I'm human
Have thoughts like any other one
Sometimes I find myself long regretting
Some foolish thing, some little simple thing I've done*

Black clouds recoil to reveal Anakin's new surroundings. He is disoriented in a rust-brown unit, unable to recall his memory. Only he, a table and chair take up space. He looks down, restricted by the handcuffs that tied his wrists together. He tries to break out of them, growing anxious, swallowed by an aggravated sea. He can feel his hair damp, sweat dripping down his forehead.

He hears a creak and is relieved when the door slides open. "Obi-Wan!"

"What the hell is going on with you?" Obi-Wan came crashing in with all the varied senses of anger — disappointment, frustration, fear. "What did you do to Padme?"

"Padme?" Anakin created a barrier with a raised hand. "Don't talk to me about Padme, alright?"

“I saw what you did to her!” Obi-Wan threw holo-photos on the desk.

Anakin reluctantly looks down and swallows hard. Photo after photo, Padme’s bruises draw a line from her eye to her neck. Splashes of blue, purple and red clash together to expose her wounds — painful, clinical, a stamp of darkness.

Shaking his head in denial, Anakin’s trembling hands motion for the nightmare to end. “I didn’t do this.”

Obi-Wan’s lips tightened, a jaded expression, done with the maze that leads to the same spot. The murmurs in his head, silenced, the souvenirs, the recollection of two brothers, gone — along with the laughter, friendly competition, the quips, the playfulness. Here he recognizes the taint in love.

“Obi-Wan! I didn’t do this to her! Ask her!” Desperation smothered Anakin’s words. “Where is she?!”

Obi-Wan gathered the holo-photos, filtering out hope. Broken promises behind his eyes are wiped away, a gloomy seal takes its place. “She doesn’t want to see you.”

Anakin felt a familiar feeling, out of control. A dimly lit mind that can no longer distinguish wistfulness and woefulness. He swings between the cause and the casualty, refusing to accept either reality. “I didn’t do this. I didn’t hurt her.”

His eyes now smoulder over Obi-Wan fiercely, looking for a place to unleash the burden, share the blame as memory returns to serve him. “I wanted to hurt you!”

Obi-Wan took that as his cue to leave. He had no intention of arguing or clearing the slate. Anakin was doomed to bury himself, swallowed whole by his own emotions. Left to decompose from the ruins of the mind.

“Tell her.” Anakin shouted back, quivering at the sight of Obi-Wan leaving everything unresolved. “Tell her!”

Obi-Wan slides the door open, tuning out the words, the room — the sound of Anakin calling his name becomes a distant echo.

He took one last look at the dark pools of fear in Anakin’s eyes, before finally shutting the door, and utters, “She’s not pressing charges. But I must inform you, you’re no longer a Jedi Knight. And I’m guessing, no longer a husband.”

Aghast, Anakin can’t bear it as he watches the door slide closed. “I can fix this. Obi-Wan!” He calls out to nothing. The dreadful response of silence haunts this empty room.

Anakin slams his fists on the table, glancing down to see a vision of himself, Darth Vader outlined on the wooden surface. A reflection wrapped in consequences.

Anakin yells out once more, and the sound that leaves his lips is not his own but the distorted, domineering, wicked drawl of Vader. “*I can fix this!*”

“I can fix this! I didn’t... I didn’t do it!” An alarmed Vader traces over his steps, enveloped by panic, agitation hanging off him.

“In reality? No.” Phren remains on the bed, breathing an inward sigh. “But the tighter you hold on, the more things spin out of control. When you feel things slipping away, the ones who stick around, pay.”

Vader finally stands still, trying to snuggle up to a pretence, denialism, as he turns up the whispers of redemption. *This can't be it.*

He takes a gentle step forward towards Sir Phren, a determined breath, and a decision — a committed intention to end the rejection of the future. And he won't stop until it smiles back at him.

*But I'm just a soul whose intentions are good
Oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood*

Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood — The Animals

3. Satisfaction

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction

“Lord Vader?” A chirpy voice sings over and over, causing Vader’s eyes to fly open. As he sits in his chamber, his eyes set firmly on the nurse, Kya, who gives him a gentle nudge. She has that familiar smile, bedside manner; admirable to some, claustrophobically annoying to him. Her blonde hair is neatly swept back in a ponytail, her tidy look and energy converges, and it seems superficial at first. She’s just doing her job. But it was so rare that a pair of eyes would settle on him and didn’t immediately exhibit a raw panic. She was warm, welcoming, waving her white flag—so to speak.

“I think you nodded off for a second there.” She chuckles lightly. It was difficult for him suddenly to keep steering his ship in an angry sea. She encourages a convincing quintessence of hospitality, and he acquiesces — more responsive than he expected. That was how long it had been since someone gave off such an airily open-heartedness and directed it towards him.

Maybe his warrior cries have been heard. A token of optimism. Someone kind, helpful, efficient. Someone cares that he’s breathing, that his heart is beating.

Vader plants his hands on either side of his chair, straightening his back to sit upright.

“How’ve you been feeling?” She asks. “Any particular issues?”

“Same as last week.” He grumbles with a voice that wasn’t quite awake.

“Alright. Can you take this off for me?” He flinches as her hands approach his mask. He hasn’t allowed anyone to visualize his vulnerability. But she seemed voraciously dedicated to her optimism, it didn’t seem so scary. It definitely didn’t seem real. An ambiguous current between them had him questioning why this interaction was taking place at all.

“Let me help you with that.” She insists, unclasping the helmet from the rest of his armour. He accepts the situation eventually, by pushing himself further into a state of suspended consciousness. Letting go of the anxieties that typically have him lashing out, acting rash — which at first, felt extremely out of character as he rages in his discomfort, like he had given up and given in to dream-like visions. But it felt strangely good. And he soon realized why.

Vader looked at her with his own eyes, a sight far stronger than it usually is. This was a vivid representation of how he used to see the world — because he wasn’t looking from Vader’s point of view. This was Anakin’s.

The great vision wasn’t the only thing that acted as a callback to a more empowered time in his own skin. He felt the leather fabric of his gloves at the tip of each finger. He felt his long hair tickle his neck as she removes his helmet. He was drifting away from the static evolution of Darth Vader and embodying the disjointed memory of being Anakin Skywalker.

She smiles once she gets a good look at his face, “What a beautiful man!”

And those words made him feel dejected. He got away with a lot when he looked like this, was treated differently, was respected due to his skill and not the fact that he could instill fear. He himself couldn't ignore the fact that there will always be a dichotomy between how people react to Anakin and how they'd take to his mutilated face. This was one of the reasons he'd never let anyone see him without his mask — because the person least accepting of him was himself. He could never put a face to his consequences.

"You must have girls throwing themselves at you all the time, don't ya?" She laughs, a fresh breeze of a chuckle as she checks that no hair strand of hers is out of place. She's flustered at the sight of young, dashing Anakin and has to will herself to remain professional.

But Vader knows, under the surface of delicate yet rugged bone structure and dark blonde locks, he is still the monster in beguiling wrapping.

She does seem to have a way of helping him put down his shield — weapons made of sharpened words, pent-up frustrations, and a tough exterior. She allows him to relax with her bright, casual smile, a feminine essence that he hasn't felt since...

She reaches for an ophthalmoscope, placing it right in front of his nose. "I've never seen such vivid blue eyes before." She says warmly, settling her patient in as a beam of light goes through one eye, bright and blinding — much like her aura.

She then aims for his other eye, with the gentleness of a woman who was used to making people feel at ease, bringing people together like glue — like nurses, mothers, and lovers with an innate gift to nurture.

He grabs her wrist as she moves the ophthalmoscope an inch away from his eyes. "Thank you," He finally utters. "For taking care of me."

She lowers the instrument while his hand remains on her arm, almost in shock, like it was the first time he ever showed an inkling of appreciation for her dutiful care.

Her mouth, along with her rouge cheeks, lift at the sides; now a far more genuine smile that came from the heart rather than her ability to switch on her professional persona in front of a patient. They both had personas to uphold yet they felt they could unsheathe an authentic role. Her eyes hold his and she leans in, touching his lips for a second.

"—I'm sorry." She quickly pulls back.

He watches her nervously fiddle with her tools, tossing them in her medical case. He gets up, overcome with the revelation that he is able to feel his own toes in his boots. His restricted, 6 foot 7 inch tall body has now embraced the joyous agility of a healthy 6 foot 1 man. He can't help but give off an amused impression as he studies himself. It feels so good to walk around freely, knowing you're not tied to anything — the way a prisoner devours the freshness of air as he takes his first steps back into freedom.

He then glances back at her, watching her descend into an embarrassed stillness as he revels in his mobility. It was incredibly humanizing and she had no idea what she had just given him in an uncalculated, uninhibited moment.

A mystifying vibration of nerves begin to crawl over him the longer he looks at her. He hadn't examined the mannerisms of another person for any reason other than to discover how

to defeat an enemy in combat. But when his eyes run along her body, he is receptive to a familiar sensitivity of Anakin's, a meticulous thought and feeling as he watches...

Her mouth,

Her neck,

And the curves of her figure.

And there was the reminder, clear and concise. A chronicle of a loving, kind and thoughtful woman.

A woman's love,

A woman's sensuality,

And a woman's warmth.

One woman in particular. *Padme.*

He walks towards her with physically cautious steps but a mind reduced to the effects of white noise, drowning out reality in the hopes that he can dream freely, relentlessly and unrestrained. Maybe, just maybe, he could pretend she *was* Padme.

He stands before her, blocking her hurried breaths with his chest. Even he is surprised at how incredibly easy it is to twist reality into an obscure out of body experience. He felt like he could bend the rules and compel his idyllic instincts that have the courage to change whatever he wanted.

His lips meet hers, eyes close as if to will himself to remember what intimacy felt like. She is open and willing to cater to the whims of a powerful man with a mercurial temperament. And he knew she was accepting of the encounter for all the wrong reasons — but he didn't care as long as he got to squeeze out an opportunity to imagine a fantasy. But his fantasy is soon shackled as his hands roam her body because his senses cannot cooperate. *She doesn't feel like Padme. Her lips don't taste like Padme.* And no amount of cerebral intervention could change what the body pulsates for.

His lips don't close on hers anymore so she opens her eyes to find him an inch further away than he was. The cerulean blue eyes in front of her build walls, and she can see the once rich ocean of blue now soulless.

He distances himself. The wheels are turning, reality is setting back into motion, and it feels like a punch in the gut.

Her head tilts as she tries to gauge him, her features awash with a bewildering curiosity. The distance between them now is quite suffocating as she fails to figure him out. A sudden gash takes her breath. She looks down and sees the red glow of his lightsaber struck through her chest. He watches her body fall to her mathematical death.

Vader's eyes flew open and his caged breathing filled his mask. He looks down, knowing that he is back in his metal prison. He doesn't need to remove his helmet to know what awaits him if he looks in the mirror. His reflection will consist of all his shortcomings, the stitched

back together fragile body that regurgitates his self-involved flaws. The divide, the duality of this man is now overshadowed by the one side that the world believes is who he truly is.

What the mask really covers up is not the defamation of Anakin Skywalker at all, but the externalization of his worst darkest self — stripped of its handsome veneer.

He gets out of his chair and spots Kya's body lying on the floor, impaled by his laser sword. And again, dreams, nightmares, and reality combine in solidarity to torment him. He takes a distinct breath before retrieving his weapon and walking off.

*And he's telling me more and more
About some useless information
Supposed to fire my imagination
I can't get no*

Anakin's eyes spring open; this time he and his surroundings share something in common — there is a lightness, a pearly iridescence of colors that exemplify his abundant emotions. He and the space he rests in are no longer under a shroud of darkness. He has broken free, broken the curse. This was the memory he had yearned to recollect, the decision he had longed to take.

He walks with a carefree eagerness, a fascination, knowing that he has accomplished exactly what he wanted. And he rejoiced in his excitable mood, even if it was at the cost of the absence of meaning.

It's definitely worth it as he enters through Padme's old apartment, and she is there on the balcony, sharing in his enthusiasm, waiting for him. A deep innocence expands within him, and for the first time in years, his inescapable paranoia shrinks.

He leans his shoulder against the wall, gazing at her with a dynamic look in his eye. She was a talent that mixed beauty, love, passion and sweetness, a visualization that bravely opened his heart. He could finally connect the dots to happier times — this was his wife — and he was joyful at the thought of getting to prioritize their future — the once forgotten discovery of hopefulness.

"You are so beautiful." He drawls.

She grins back at him with an imaginative zest for what's to come. "I'm . . . so glad you're home." She stuns in a silvery-blue silk nightdress, giving him a glimpse of the curves beneath that stirred a giddiness within him, with strings of beads around her neck and shoulders like a present waiting to be unwrapped.

He motions for her to come to him and a soft giggle escapes her lips. He waits for her with open arms until they embrace. He inclines his head toward hers, taking what belonged to him with a meaningful, ravenous kiss.

"I left the Order." He blurted out before his lips had fully left hers.

“What?” Her puzzled but kind eyes implore with a simple and supportive interest. “But. . .it’s your dream.”

He smiles down at her with a loving positivity as he hones all his attention onto her pregnant belly.

“Not anymore.” He rubs her baby bump with reverence.

He focuses on their growing family, taken aback by a profound and poignant reminder of what could’ve been if he had taken this truth to heart back then. He now — with a deep thoughtfulness — knew this was his time to assimilate, make a difference, change the course, paint a new picture of the risks of danger and safety and what it really meant to root for what’s important. It’s all performance art. He has finally cracked the code, returned to the right spot at the right time, and took control of the narrative.

Anakin stands in the living room, staring out at the open skies and lakes of Naboo.

The quiet, calmness surrounding the lake house is quickly interrupted as Padme rushes through the door. She throws her shawl onto the sofa before she makes her way to him. “What a day!” She huffs after kissing his cheek in an out-of-breath manner.

He turns around, watching her head back to the sofa.

She nurtures her now bigger stomach with strokes of her hand. “You wouldn’t believe the mess they made with the constitution amendments—” Her voice trails off as Anakin zones out.

He can barely hang on to her words, consumed with his own dire thoughts.

“...I feel lost.” The words come out without him fully realizing he had said them out loud.

“Lost?” Padme is forced out of her own ranting. She gets up to join him. Encouraging him to speak more by placing an attentive hand on his back. “What do you mean?”

He shrugs, turning back to the window. “It’s. . .gonna come out wrong.”

“Try me.”

He gives way for her affection, now looking into her eyes. “...I know I should be fulfilled — and I am. I love our life together. It’s just...”

“What?” Her eyes squint but she remains patient.

“When I had power, I was *somebody*. I had a say in what happens in the world. I had some control over how things turn out... Now I’m on the outside looking in. Again.”

“Do you miss being a Jedi?”

“No. But I miss feeling like I’m doing something significant. I was important.”

“You’re important to me. . .you’re going to be very significant to our child.” She assures. “You don’t need power to have value. You mean something to the people who *care*.”

“You’re right.” He reluctantly accepts, more so wanting to brush off the discussion. He runs his fingers through her hair and plants a light kiss on her forehead.

She smiles, giving his arms a squeeze, hoping to instill confidence. He forces a smile back to reassure her, burying his doubts and worries. He has everything he ever wanted and yet he still felt dissatisfied. Why was what he deemed his purpose in life — his family — not enough?

“Come here,” She suggestively tugs at his tunic, “I’ll show you just how significant you are.”

She begins undressing herself, a sensual dance, completely snapping him out of any unwelcome thoughts. He is now fully locked in on his lustful impulses, surrendering to the joy of being in his body, about to watch the unwrapping of a gift and engage in the creation of ecstasy.

He gawks at her in all her glory. A delicately sculpted perfection that was her bare body. The dainty curve of her neck that meets her clavicle, her sultry skin that glistens, shining through him, making him feel nourished and aroused, and the lush roundness of her breasts, shapely hips, and ample bottom that had him wanting to vulgarize every inch of her angelic curves.

He swallows a gulp. The image of her had replayed in his memory when he was Vader. He had forgotten what it felt like to actively, personally get lost in all the intensities and desirabilities of their marriage — and now, in this life, no matter how many times they made love, it felt like the first time.

“Let me help you with that.” She beams, eager to undress him.

Anakin sits on the bed, pulling her onto him. Her legs clamp around his hips. He looks up at her as she sits on top of him, and the gesture before him is proof that sometimes excess is a necessary dream — it is violently provoking him to take it all, a cry for desire to be fulfilled — because right now he has this insatiable longing to immerse himself in her, caress every inch of her skin, to stain himself in her kisses, moans, odour. She is sex and sensuality blended in the way only his wife can be — she unlocks her mystery for only him, and it’s the only one he wants to discover.

He holds her close, cherishing her cascading brown curls that flow down her shoulders, her eyes give a suggestive invitation that pierce his soul, her neck, the object of his desire as he trails kisses along it, and the response of her supple breasts to his fingers ignites a fire within.

The softest moan leaves her lips as her hands lavish the edges of his shoulders and the virility of his chest with attention, slithering down to his member quivering impatiently. The elasticity of her hands, the tight grips to loose strokes, has him dissolving with fervor, losing his senses.

With a dizzy hunger, he lifts her by the hips, urging himself inside her. And becoming one soul is what completion feels like — living only for her mouth, her hands, her body with reckless abandon.

It is the most perfect sensation, complemented by the raw erotic whispers of his name — her voice makes him feel drunk, overflowing with passion. When he's throbbing inside her, he is powerful, in a dazzling state of freedom — a constant.

A storm showers over her mesmerizing brown eyes, turning them green and, for a second, her chestnut coils are straight blonde strands. The flash of a face that isn't Padme. He blinks hard in shock, confused until he finds the face of his wife before him again. He breathes out a sigh of relief, evaporating intrusive thoughts.

To further shake out any other unconscious disruptions, he drags her down to lie flat on the bed, rolling over her until he is on top. He enters her, resting his body weight over hers. He finds a balance as he cradles her face, a gentle caress beautifully contrasting a burning turbulence; the duality of Anakin, ravishing her with every thrust of his hips, a possessive claim with a tender touch.

Looking down at her, he is flooded by febrile waves, his shaft engulfed in her warm womb. It would take the suns, planets, and moon to move simultaneously to get him to pull out. He is annihilated, absorbed in this pool of seduction, madness, a hypnotic craving. His entire body had been licked by her flame, and the taste of her, it is what gives him strength and invincibility.

She blooms with an openness, a femininity, an angelic grace merged with a sultry temptation as he pounds into her. Her hands rise to hold onto him, her mouth agape, making him neurotic — her wild cries are the poetic songs of satisfaction. She transforms before his eyes, enveloped by the pleasure he gives her, she unravels in every excruciatingly euphoric way. His eyes locked onto her with worshipful admiration.

Everything but the two of them vanishes in the hazy, sweaty air. He has melted his skin with hers, finally. He is grateful for the tender way she accepts that she is his. He found a way to get her back; he can now be happy.

But when his eyes land on her, it isn't Padme under him. The flashes of blonde hair and green eyes are here to stay. He feels icy pulsations through his body, replacing the fiery tingling of pleasure that was there moments ago. He is now tormented with a staggering fear hitting his nerves as he sees his old nurse invading his bed.

He shakes his head, closing his eyes with an erratic urge, desperate for control over the situation. But he opens his eyes to find Kya still there.

Had he messed with reality so much that he could no longer identify it?

This isn't happening! He tries to convince himself, almost brought to tears by the sheer insanity. Overwhelmed by the power of his own mind, he hurriedly pulls himself off her.

He prances around the room from one side to the other, hands in his hair, fighting to ease his mind and return to his life with Padme.

"Ani, are you alright?" She gets up, concerned. She reaches for him but he quickly steps back.

"Where's my wife?!" He rages, "What have you done with Padme?"

The nurse tries to calm him down. "Anakin..."

“Bring Padme back.” He waves his finger at her, hoping his defiance would eclipse his fear. “Bring her back right now!”

He corners Kya, slamming his hand on the wall beside her head, making her wince.

“...She’s gone.” She breathes out carefully.

Anakin takes a step away from her and reverts back to charging around the room in thunderous circles. “What is it that you want? Huh?!” He pauses for an answer and is met with her sighs of sympathies. ‘Money, power, immunity? An apology?!’ His eyes dart from her only to settle on non-existent rhetorics in his head. To her, it seemed like he was staring at nothing — until those distant blue eyes came stalking back at her. He dashes towards her, each step was volcanic. “Fine. I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry for what I did to you and anyone else! Now tell me where my wife is!”

His head blocked her view, his breath slapped her face. She had to close her eyes, it was so daunting.

“I’m sorry.” She gathered herself and eventually made eye contact. “It seems in your anger, you killed her.”

Frozen in his spot, a million feelings flush Anakin’s face. Tortured with disbelief, he stares at her, or past her. His eyes slowly regaining their humanity, turning soft and sad, mournful for a semblance of order. He can no longer see the blonde hair, the hazel green eyes as his own eyes film over, blurring the view.

His metal hand grabs her neck, pinning her to the wall. She begins to whimper, trying to break free, but he simply shakes his head, tearing up. He can’t stop himself, he just wants to wake up from the nightmare.

She tries kicking him off, so he drags her by the neck to the bed. She falls back onto the mattress but his grip tightens, unwavering as he hovers over her. Her hands flap about, hitting his face and neck but his hyperfocus tunes it all out with a vengeance. He is possessed by fury... until he steals her last breath.

It is only when life completely leaves her body that he lets go and he realizes the woman on the bed isn’t Kya.

Lying underneath him is the luscious brown curls, the soft pink pouty lips, and the smooth ivory face of Padme.

Eyes wide in shock, he stumbles back, tripping as he hurries out the door.

Darth Vader opens his eyes, his shoulder pressed up against the wall of the prison cell. Phren sits opposite him on the bed, legs crossed, arms folded. “You sure do take risks, Lord Vader. But so does your mind.”

Vader catches his breath. “What is going on? Every time I go back, I lose her.”

“Well,” Phren began with an uncrossing of the legs. “The subconscious is powerful, and if there’s one silver lining here, it’s that you’ve become aware of your solipsism.”

Vader shook his head slightly, as if it exerted too much effort. But Phren continued assertively. “You loved Padme more than anything and yet you ended up treating her as carelessly as those you don’t care for — like your nurse who, mind you, has doted on you for years,”

“—However you finally feel guilt — and not just for what you did to Padme.” Phren sounded optimistic as if it were a revelation. “But... your guilt began to eat away at you. One of the reasons for your hallucinations.”

Vader couldn’t see any silver lining, he just hated himself more. Now he felt even weaker than he did when he started this whole thing.

“You got what you wanted, a perfect life with your wife, and you couldn’t enjoy it — *the curse of the dark side*. Some would say...” Phren paused. “Excess. It’s never enough... That’s how dreams turn into nightmares.”

Vader knew he had to do something different. No more repeating history—or letting his self-indulgent cravings, thoughts, guilt, and fears determine his reality. He was literally driving himself crazy. Somehow the conflict within him had turned him into a stranger to himself. He has become his own worst enemy. His mind seemed to get stuck on the road less traveled, and his heart kept looking over the fence to see if the grass was in fact greener, freer, more powerful... “How do I turn it around?”

“The outcome won’t change unless *you* change.” Phren leaned forward. “But you *can* change... at any moment.”

And it was these words that sparked Vader’s new plan.

*I can't get no satisfaction
I can't get no girl reaction
'Cause I try, and I try, and I try, and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no
'Cause you see, I'm on a losing streak*

I Can’t Get No Satisfaction — The Rolling Stones

4. Dance of Desire

The Dance Of Desire (Bonus Chapter)

Vader's Dream / Anakin's Obsessions of the Mind

*Oh ma douce souffrance
Pourquoi s'acharner? Tu recommences
Je ne suis qu'un être sans importance
Sans lui, je suis un peu paro*

*Oh my sweet suffering
Why do you attack incessantly?
I am just a being without importance
Without it, I am a bit lost*

*Une dernière danse
Pour oublier ma peine immense
Je veux m'enfuir que tout recommence*

*A last dance
To forget my immense pain
I want to run away, for everything to begin again*

Darth Vader closes his eyes and lets his dreams take him away to a dark night on Tatooine.

He remembers the feeling that encompasses him, how much he wanted to play with fire back then as he crept through the village of the Tusken Raiders. It was only a matter of time until he was burned. He had suppressed so many of his volcanic urges, he was bound to watch them bubble up sooner or later. And they did boil over, in all ways, from all sides when he could no longer cope. And he was hooked from the very first drop — dipping his toes in a torrent of temptation. Quenched by the relief of getting what you want, be it revenge, power, the restlessness of lust.

He approaches the first tent and feels a familiar sense of indulgence as he taps into an egomaniacal state.

Not dissimilar from the all-consuming hunger he finally fed the first time he made love to Padme.

Anakin takes his first steps into Padme's bedroom in the Naboo lake retreat. She's standing there with a sense of gaiety, looking like an angel in her white lace wedding gown with myriad pearl seed details and sheer sleeves. She is love, glamour, charm with an allure, where sensuality is explored, where all the senses come to life, making him feel oceanic — in

a sea of unpredictability, liberation, where anything is possible — like he has raised to a higher state of consciousness, euphoria seeping out of every pore as he trembles with excitement. Life is opening up for him as he is about to be subject to, for the first time, the true vibrations of getting your heart's desires.

He strides towards her as she pulls off her veil. His fingers reach for her, leaving a palpable trail along the sides of her neck — it is sensual, feminine, too delicate to touch. It felt like he was breaking the law to cradle such a vulnerable part of her because it made him feel so full, so greedy, like he had something valuable in his hands that he was never going to give up. His lips find hers and the tip of their tongues touch. He scoops her hair off the back of her neck and overpowers her with a voluptuous kiss, inhaling as much of her as he could like she was a zesty wine. His hands possess her body, down her sides, outlining her curves, gliding down her thighs. To touch the one you love felt like landing on the moon — you're unstoppable. He scrunches up the lace material of her dress in his fists, dissipated, dying to unite their heartbeats, febrility, and dreams as he lifts her skirt above her hips.

He lifts open the tent flap and he is quivering for a release of all his pent-up anger and frustration. He aims his lightsaber behind two of the sand people and feeds a voracious void as he slashes both of them, wanting to treat them as callously as they treated his mother. He has no compassion to look at them as living, breathing beings and he was ready to lose his own humanity if it meant he would now have the chance to take control and fix what they broke. He can now unshackle himself from the restraints placed on him all his life, no one can hold him back anymore. He is about to experience a flagrant freedom — and it feels so good to finally give into revenge.

And it feels so good to give into this impulse as they undress each other. To finally give into a burning desire and take what you want religiously. Anakin is aching with desperation as his eyes gaze upon Padme's naked body. He fights to close the space between them, forcing her backwards to the bed. She falls back onto the mattress and his body settles over her — skin upon skin, raw, emotional, colourful, magical. His mouth hovers over hers, their lips only lightly brush against each other's, a shivering elongated tease — he can taste her before their tongues touch. The rhythms of their breathing synchronize, heavy, a sped up pace as their hips align. To feel her skin under his makes him dizzy. His hand traces a line in between her breasts, devoted to every curve he can fit in his spread out fingers. Watching her melt by the touch of his hand, he realizes he paralyzes her as much as she paralyzes him. His fingers swipe past her stiff nipple.

And with a wave of his hand, he tosses wood logs, flips over tents, drags building blocks to reveal the hidden enemies who were panicked, seeking cover from him. They try to fight back but quickly realize it's a losing battle; they cry out to each other to ensure the safety of the tribe, urging the women and children to get a head start as they flee the area. As the men form lines surrounding the vulnerable, they put forth their weapons and shields, hoping their combined strength will put a stop to the terrorist. But Anakin kept taking methodical steps towards them, like he was in no hurry. He was going to catch up. As the sand people raced across the desert, Anakin jerked two fingers and, using the force, he pulled the weakest link towards him only to knock him on his back.

Anakin yanks Padme's legs back, moving her down to the centre of the bed only to flip her over onto her stomach. He feels a swirling sensation inside, a tantalizing addiction, an

irresistible provocation as her buttocks press against his pelvis. His finger travels ever so slowly in between her shoulder blades before resting on the small of her back.

A suitless Vader's hand flails ever so slowly to lower the factory doors on Mustafar, locking the Separatist leaders inside. And it becomes a dance, a game, as his lightsaber thrashes from one side to the other — taking lives meant nothing at this point. He valued life less and less as each kill terminates a layer of his own humanity. It is hard not to become drunk with power once you are no longer the helpless 8 year old. He is now undefeatable, he can coerce any being, he can make anyone do whatever he wants with no push back. He shoves people from one side to the other, clearing the way of his path — almost gleeful, his darkest moods, caprices aroused by the corruption of the force. The decadence he can cause is now an inflamed thrill. And he has had a taste; there is no going back. It is the closest he can get to feeling alive. The last raw emotion he has left before he fully rises as Darth Vader — all the power of the force is in his hands.

Anakin worships Padme's hips and derriere, loving how docile she is in his hands. It makes him feel alive, commanding, masterful. He can barely restrict the ardent eruptions of lust ripping out of him; he feels a devouring urge to have, hold, and influence her. He takes hold of her behind, giving each cheek a squeeze.

Vader squeezes the throat of a separatist, and music begins to play in his head. Every tone, every note rumbles with energy. No instrument should be left dormant, unplayed. He doesn't miss a beat (or a person). It is merely an art form now — he is no longer sympathetic to the pain of others; they are simply obstacles... and Vader has never been fond of obstacles — he didn't have the patience for them. He can now only hear the thrash of symbols as he cuts through everyone in his way, his arms unconfined like an orchestra conductor.

His eyes turn the colour of yellow amber, transforming into a full-fledged Sith and he knows he has done it — he has allowed himself to be seduced by temporary, fleeting satisfactions. The more lives he steals, the more his own is lost. And finding alleviation in these titillations won't last long; he will suffer in the morning once the high disappears and he is left feeling empty again because he has trained himself to refill through all the wrong things, excesses, self-serving notions devoid of any real meaning. But right now, he doesn't care that this won't fully satiate him. He is volatile, sucked into the oblivion as he stabs Viceroy Gunray.

Anakin enters Padme from behind and the senses, the sounds, the scents take him to heaven. It is only when he makes love to her that he can combine his burning passion with spiritual human emotion. This is the true definition of happiness. It is soulful, long-lasting, a connection that rings deep in the soul — unlike the shallow depths the Sith chase. If only Anakin could hinder his quest for curated gratification and understood what patience really offers. Padme is the last emblem of love he has left and he can't help but start to take advantage of her giving nature because he wants her vitality, devotion, and warmth all for himself. He knows how easily his own could slip away.

He won't measure up to the Jedi's standards now that he has wielded himself in her, deeply attached himself to her. There is a throbbing fire enveloping his flesh every time he slides into her. The sensation of their bodies entwined is symphonic — his heart matches the beat of drums; the orchestra plays again, a gradation of intensity and as he smoulders with passion,

swelling with enthusiasm as his engorged member is submerged in her wet essence, here come the violins.

He approaches the final Separatist leader. Each step he takes towards her is a thumping sound, operatic; his abilities are reaching octaves that increase the frequency of his thirst for power. The woman's pleas are nothing but songs in his head. His mind left the scene, his soul has abandoned him, his heart has flown away, hidden under the darkness where he has built a home with the remains, the lies he tells himself. He is impervious to her screams. Her cries drown out...

...One screams in terror.

The other screams from pleasure...

...Every noise around him is muffled by Padme's loud, soft moans. There is no sound more harmonious than listening to her submit to him with gratitude for what he gives her, a profound eroticism, a meaningful connection. A deep connection he has searched for, hoping it would bring him stability. She kneels up against him, letting the back of her head rest on his shoulder. His lips linger on her earlobe, on the side of her neck. He is engulfed in her flavor, texture, driving himself wild as his hands surround her possessively. His finger trails down her stomach, and further down, conquering in between her legs . . .

Vader's lightsaber trails along the woman's abdomen, and further down, to slice her from hip to hip. The soul leaves first, diminishing into thin air as she falls to her physical death.

Anakin pushes Padme back down onto the mattress; she waits for him on all fours. He takes his place inside her, wanting to pound into her many times over just to perspire in the feeling again — the beautifully agonizing infatuation with a ferocious potency, the delicious sense of being in her — where he regains his soul. He starts off with slow, subtle thrusts, giving her heartbeat time to settle as she becomes dissolved with rapture. But watching her happily give herself to the fervid insanity, an orgasmic promise, has him quickly overcome with a violent rush to torment her, making her need him as much as he needs her. He knows that as he satisfies her, he is making them become one so he can own her and soak up as much joy from her as he can. He has to be reminded of the gift of discipline, he must learn how to achieve true calmness so his anxieties won't make him erratic, failing to control heightened emotions, a dysregulated nervous system — so he can stop testing himself and those he loves, pushing them away.

He clutches onto her hips, and slams into her to dominate, claim, make her a part of his flesh, knowing she will forever be dependent on him for such exaltations. Beams of sweat drip from his hair as he feels her walls tighten around his shaft. The violins are louder now as he pulls her closer and closer, making her hips dance for him. She yelps as he ravages his way in deeper, holding himself inside her for a while to wholeheartedly take in her glorious warm fluid that lathers his shaft. As he fills her up, he waits, a moment in the stillness before he percolates through a yearning obliteration.

And in the silence, the red glow of a now suited Vader's lightsaber shines as it ignites, turning on every light bulb in the minds of everyone on the rebel ship. The group of soldiers come to the realization that they are doomed when their door is sealed shut. There is no exit strategy, only a massacre to witness as the Dark Lord seizes their guns. Vader subtly glides through like a thunderous storm, an elegant rain, a dark cloud, a whirlwind of cyclical

movements with all his lightsaber swings and gouges — and his black leather gloves sting with rapacity, seeking every soul in the room — maybe he would find some repletion, maybe he could feel full for a while... tame his anger at least until it is granted a rebirth again, a seasonal habit over and over — never completely sated, never free from urgency, compulsions.

There is no peace, only suffering. The suffering has become a high in the throes of mania. He fails to self-stimulate, self-soothe; he must take whatever is luminous in others. Protection has morphed into control. He draws one of the troops to him through the hallway, rising him to the roof of the ship and feeds a deliciously vandalistic appetite as he crushes the rebel's throat with the closing of his fist.

Closing his fist tightly around Padme's soft hair strands, Anakin tugs her hair back to plunge himself deeper into her centre. He can feel her quaking from the inside as her moans grow louder from the overwhelming delirium so he slows down, pumping in slowly, soothingly. His hand now glides to the front of her neck as his upper body leans on hers and his knees weaken. Only with her can he be gentle, considerate, where he feels calm and safe. She stabilizes him, humanizes him, reassures him with an emotional bond. His face becomes buried in her tousled curls while his fingers wrap around her neck, handling her with tender loving care.

Darth Vader snatches another rebel by the neck, basking in the man's struggle, in watching someone so powerless in your hand. But the action is quickly losing its appeal. Murder has become monotonous, he is watching his own flames within him die of asphyxiation as he wraps his fingers around his victim's neck, recognizing the vanquishing of heat from the man's body as he chokes him out — wishing he felt some spark of life flare up in himself.

Anakin feels Padme flaring up, heat surrounds her body, her glistening skin melts with his as he tightens his sweaty, slippery grip on her neck. She begs for his strength, loving his verve, masculinity, the unrestrained ardor he brings. And this is the last place to find a source of life's spices. Because together, she has never felt more of a woman, he has never felt more of a man than in this moment when they combine their emotions, amorous melodies, and mystic creations, inventions and strengths of the soul in love.

It is these characteristics that keep him alive; his irrational wonders, his jealousy, his shadows, his sexual demands, his need to belong to someone.

When he is alone, he is waiting for death. Because without her, life has no range, no silkiness, no poetry. He doesn't even have fear anymore, nothing to shake, cry and pulse for. He had sabotaged everything when she died due to his fear. And now he has even sabotaged his fear. He feels and fears nothing as Darth Vader.

He missed being a red-blooded man, with all the intricacies, flaws, whims that accompany that feeling. He wants to find a balance between innocence and perversity, the variations of maturity and wisdom. But he settles for a found freedom in roughness, a misrepresentation of liberty, in uninhibited brutality as he throws a soldier across the hallway.

He flips Padme on her back. He now rests his body over her; his hand grazes up her thigh to the round curve of her hip; her fingers splayed across his back. His mouth is lured to her neck, to skim lower, to devour her breast, tasting its sweetness as he pounds into her with a

virile intensity. Inside her he can feel the staggering buildup... He is about to relish the physical, sensual rewards of living.

As he stands before Count Dooku with both lightsabers aimed at his head, he is tempted to relinquish any and all discipline he had gained from his Jedi training thus far. He had returned to the chaos of his childhood. The immature instincts of a vengeful boy. He struggles to fight the ticking time bomb that invigorates him. The longing to overpower is flowing through his veins.

He used to channel his animalistic impulses into her, to give passion, to selflessly make her happy — because she soothed the monster within that craved to be fed. She gathers him in a blanket of light.

Now he channels his animalistic impulses into his enemies, to take energy — distractions for survival — to selfishly fuel dark, cultivated behaviours.

He can't contain himself for much longer as he gazes at her cherry lips, slipping his thumb in her mouth to revel the touch of her healing tongue. But it only spurs him on further, he can't pull back from the brink. His now wet thumb drags down her neck, he is becoming devastatingly woozy as his appendage stiffens inside her, about to blow.

He is ready to let loose as he aims both lightsabers against Dooku's neck and with a surge of electricity coursing along every inch of his flesh, he is about to puncture his skin. The hunt for triumph is over. He feels superior, unraveling with the explosive win as the lightsabers meet at the cross—

—and he feels that sweet release. Anakin comes inside Padme — finally surrendering, with a burning passion, to the burst of desire.

He collapses on top of her and her hand massages his head, entwining her fingers in his hair, providing him with a spiritual sustenance as he closes his eyes.

He got what he wanted — relief, stability, tranquility, fulfillment, release... he can now evolve into a state of serenity and therein lies strength.

Vader wakes up from his dream, from torturous imaginations, from trying to seek serenity and stability in different ways. The reward gained through the shortcuts, the fast roads, will never be as fulfilling as the ones achieved through means of effort and patience.

To find a balance within himself, to earn peace and end suffering, he must work with the changes, shades, and patterns of life. . .and learn to let go.

***Je remue le ciel, le jour, la nuit
Je danse avec le vent, la pluie
Et je danse***

*I move the sky, day and night
I dance with the wind, the rain*

And I dance

***Que d'espérance
Sur ce chemin en ton absence
J'ai beau trimer
Sans toi ma vie n'est qu'un décor qui brille, vide de sens***

*Only hopelessness
On this path in your absence
I slaved away in vain
Try as I might, without you my life is just a shiny display, empty of meaning*

Derniere Danse — Indila

(Last Dance — Indila)

5. The One

The (Chosen) One

*Did I disappoint you or let you down?
Should I be feeling guilty or let the judges frown?
Cause I saw the end before we'd begun
Yes I saw you were blinded and I knew I had won
So I took what's mine by eternal right
Took your soul out into the night*

Anakin braced himself as he approached Obi-Wan in the Jedi temple, who was gazing out at the eclectic skyscrapers of Coruscant through a translucent glass window. Obi-Wan admired the structures — they were all different in aesthetic but they followed the same patterns. There was order, architectural boundaries; nothing really out of the ordinary but always evolving in design. It reminded him of his own work ethic. He was always looking to improve, finding where he fits within the boundaries and outlines — gone were the days where he liked to test them... *A work in progress*. He had high standards but he lived up to them.

Anakin's need to knock down boundary after boundary, colour outside the lines, and recreate the recklessness he grew up in wasn't foreign to Obi-Wan. He was the older brother after all, hawk-eyed; the cynic — always wanting to prepare the younger one for the worst. But the criticism was arguably restrictive. Not all criticism was constructive but *destructive*. Anakin may have needed an anchor but while some anchors offer stability, others provide a feeling of entrapment.

Anakin was on the cusp of something unique, even though he couldn't quite articulate what it was. He knew there was something missing from the equation when it came to the Jedi. Their philosophy seemed misrepresented by its practitioners. Because it seemed to him, that without channelling any semblance of a dark side, no one would feel whole. Maybe that was the balance he needed to feel centered.

There is only one true way to be free and that is to transcend the comfortable by rebelling, penetrating through new discoveries. *Another risk. Another execution.*

Anakin huffed, catching Obi-Wan's attention. "Master, I'm not ready."

Obi-Wan turned around to face the 19 year old sporting a padawan braid and brown and black Jedi robes. Obi-Wan still hadn't quite reached the benchmark of true, devoted brotherhood. Right now Anakin was still the responsibility, not the friend. But age changes things... All siblings grow to love each other, eventually, *by choice*.

"I can't do this mission." Breathing out the dreaded words felt like finally breaking a bad habit, remoulding.

Obi-Wan's face was a perpetual question mark. Anakin was beginning to wonder if his raised eyebrow would ever come down... It did, as soon as his eyes relaxed.

"Anakin, I've had my doubts too but the council—"

"—send someone else." Anakin cut him off as gently as he could. "Someone good. Someone you know will protect her."

Obi-Wan dismissed him with a chastising flail of his hand, in no mood to sanction another one of Anakin's irreverent sprees. "Anakin—"

"And. . .you gotta give me a couple days off."

And there it is. Obi-Wan knew it was coming. Expect the unexpected with his Padawan.

Anakin fidgeted with an oblique glance, diagonal to Obi-Wan, trying to obstruct his nosy glare.

"I'm sorry." Anakin continued with a calm definitive stance while his hands were tucked in the sleeves of his cloak. "There's something I've gotta do."

Obi-Wan reluctantly met his eye-line "Anakin, this is hardly the time—" He said flatly.

"—It's my mother."

Obi-Wan sighed. Normally he'd brush this off in a heartbeat but there was something about Anakin in this moment. He wasn't his usual pushy self; more introspective. A far more vulnerable Anakin with grand inhibitions on display, a self-consciousness. He was no longer attached to his arrogant veneer. There were no loud words, deceptive thoughts; just a painful honesty in his eyes, asking for a favour — a great favour as though he knew the repercussions, the weight of what he was asking, and he was asking for it with his tail in between his legs.

But Obi-Wan knew that if he agreed, it would be first time he disobeyed the council. "The Jedi have rules, Anakin. And we need you here. *I* need you."

Anakin wrestled with a hesitance — not a hesitance in his decision but in the new way he had come to this decision. It's true, there is a sense of peace that comes from doing the right thing; there's no need to get defensive with those who challenge it. It was a change of heart, looking to piece together a plan through rational thinking rather than relying on vibrant, and at times biased, instinct. He naturally expected everyone to march to the beat of his own drum, whereas now... could he compose and reframe the future for the better, and might he actually end up helping more people than he initially planned.

"...She needs me more." Anakin felt a release, doing what he loved most — taking action. Being *the fixer*.

For the longest time it felt, to Anakin, like Obi-Wan only ever saw a fraction of him — the fraction he could love. The rest was too difficult, untameable, frightening even... Obi-Wan could never play the unconditional father, they were too competitive. But today, it got a little easier to be a brother and deny all the mess in between. Because Anakin didn't come to him

from a place of naive entitlement but from a well-versed understanding of his sage choices and sacrifices.

Anakin walked away knowing that he couldn't think too much about it. Because it was too painful, too cruel to realize who the goodbye was for. *Her*.

*Goodbye my lover
Goodbye my friend
You have been the one
You have been the one for me*

As he waited in the senate halls for the rest of the Jedi to arrive, Anakin snuck behind a pillar to switch on a holo-projector

"Look at you all grown up!" His mother's mellifluous voice comes out of a blue filtered hologram. She takes in the sight of her son in his darker Jedi robes as he's about to embark on a new phase of his career.

Anakin feels her warmth with the motherly praise she sends his way. The serenity of their talks would be mundane to passersby but to Anakin, looking into his mother's eyes felt like looking at home — the best version of himself, the traits his mother passed down onto him, the ones he sometimes forgot to live up to.

"You alright?" He asks.

"Never better." Her big grin transforms into a heartfelt gaze; her eyes carried a concoction of optimism, relief, and sentiment, overcome with emotion at getting to see and hear her son. "Oh, Ani I'm so proud of you... But you need a haircut."

He chuckles at her teasing until a sight catches his heart. From the corner of his eye, he sees the back of a woman in a familiar purple puff-sleeved dress and shawl with broaches. Her hair pulled up in a bun held by a crescent-shaped hair accessory. He didn't need her to turn around to know who it was.

"Alright mom, I gotta go." He says, not taking his eyes off Padme. "Say hi to the family for me."

"I will."

He quickly chips in, "Listen, I'll call you as soon as I get a chance."

"No you won't." Shmi coos softly but it causes a vertical wrinkle to appear between his eyebrows. "Anakin. . . we need to let each other go."

There's an ebb and flow of sensitivity shown on his face, and a grave flutter in his gut.

"We are destined to walk our own paths." She explained in a reassuring manner, understanding the gravity of his destiny. "Winding roads may cross but they must drift off. It's the stages of life." She blows him a kiss and cuts off the connection.

Anakin looks back up to find Padme had disappeared too.

*And I still hold your hand in mine
In mine when I'm asleep
And I will bare my soul in time
When I'm kneeling at your feet*

"I like the long hair."

As soon as he hears those words said in a sprightly manner with a subtle, mysterious charm — the equivalent of a wink in tone and pitch — Anakin breathes out with a sense of glee, knowing exactly who stood behind him. His heart, full of stars at the sound of her voice. A voice that matched the face when he turned around — a celestial beauty.

I know. He smiles at her like they were both in on a secret. There is an almost playful gesture, opaque enough but there's an intellectual history there as he greets her by her title as though they hadn't once fused the same imaginings and kindled romantic creations together — an opium that inspires the soul. "*Senator Amidala.*"

"Oh please! Call me Padme." She sings with an affable grin. "You should know better than that by now."

"I should. *By now.*" He nods before shifting his weight, tending forward so his lips hover a little closer to her, knowing he's about to utter the prettiest word in all languages. "*Padme.*"

The way he said her name almost conjured up a strange fever, a vague, impassive memory... But she quickly forgets the thought. He, on the other hand, feels like a dreamer provoked by all the exaltations, reveries of past lives. Escaping into intoxications like saying her name was the key to a vivid feeling, a paradise, a love so alive it was on fire. He missed the frenzy, the heightened remembrance of fireworks. He'd be lying if he said he didn't still have a thirst for the heat, the dangers of lust.

Guess that old saying is true: *Much more genius is needed to make love than to command armies.*

He missed the pleasure, the thrill, of her surrendering to him. The real tragedy — it all slipped through his fingers like sand. What was it about temptations and taboos that challenged the beast within him, igniting his mischievous fanaticism? Especially when he is told it is unattainable.

After all, to him, nothing was unsustainable. He never wasted time being "realistic."

"I hear congratulations are in order, Jedi *Master.*" There's that tempting tone again, a verbal wink if you will, as she emphasizes that last word and it doesn't exactly help his hectic impulse, waiting to pounce. But he stays calm, disciplined — well, as disciplined as one can be when they're all riled up on the inside.

She gazes at him with such a modest warmth, though, that he finds himself placid thanks to her sensual voice. “I knew you’d do great things, Ani.”

He is appreciative, ducking his head down a little with respect, almost remorseful, wistful for a time when he was blessed by her aura, her support, her reverence. His smile is subtle, thin but meaningful. “Thanks.”

The twinkle in her eye never stops sparkling as she turns away but he wants to embellish the interaction. Ardent curiosity is deadly. What is the bigger killer, temptation or expectation?

As she’s about to head off, he succumbs to the habit of wonder and calls after her, “Padme,”

She regards him with a polite smile and he watches her with contemplative, dewy eyes. “...Are you happy?”

Seemingly caught off guard, it takes a beat for her to acknowledge whether that was the best description of her curated life. Did she sometimes feel like throwing a spanner in the works of her orderly routine? Sure, there were days when she felt a craving for spontaneity, to be taken on a whimsical adventure...

But, on second thought, there was enough risk in politics, and it was a rewarding profession most of the time. “Yeah... actually, I,” She leans in to whisper. “I’m pregnant.”

“Pregnant.” He repeats inaudibly like he needed to say it to believe it.

Her hands cradle her belly and there’s a glimmer of excitement in her eyes wanting to fully embrace it, like she hasn’t been able to during these trying times in the galaxy. “We’re not telling people just yet because it’s kind of early.”

“We...?” Anakin’s face fell — a visual cut, a visceral jealousy when a hand wraps around his former wife’s waist.

“Oh there you are!” She shoots the man a loving smile, rubbing his arm. It takes a minute for Anakin to look him in the eye, he was too busy shooting steak knives at the placement of the man’s hand. “Honey, this is Anakin, an old friend. Anakin, this is my husband.”

“Hi. Palo.” Palo holds his hand out. “Nice to meet you.”

The hand shake is almost wrung out of Anakin against his will. He goes numb, blinded by his tunnel vision leading the way out of ordinary living, putting his blinkers on. He had left his body, looking for a better truth. This experience caused too many of his demons to pop up; possessiveness, pride, ego... all the menacing tints of his cellular structure. Dark traits creep up again. He hadn’t worked this hard to be tested to such a painful degree.

She settled for this. Average, normal, a standard kind of love. Unlike them and all they used to be — their passion was original, unconventional.

“Anakin’s a Jedi Master.” Padme relays to her husband.

“Oh!” Palo offers a respectful nod with a lift of his eyebrows, impressed.

Anakin only faintly hears them but it separates him from his mind-numbing expectancy — wanting to be fooled, for this whole ordeal to slip away and be another one of his unprovoked delusions. He isn't really looking at them as his sight blurs.

"As of today." Anakin forces out a reply with an insuperable effort; his eyes still bleary as he sinks further and further into a bottomless pit of hopelessness. He's doing his best to reduce the intensity of this strangling ache; he becomes drowsy, trying to anaesthetize out of self-preservation—or denial.

"Congratulations." Palo's voice wanes as Anakin zones out, subdued. He closes his eyes and rubs his brow as if to ward off a headache, turning away from them.

Palo's forehead crinkles, concerned, "Are you alright?" But Anakin can barely hear him under the frantic cries in his head — violent shrieks of disorder.

"Ani, are you okay?" Her voice only makes it worse, pulling him back into a dreary haze when she places a hand on his arm.

"Yeah, I — just need a minute." He pinches the bridge of his nose, swiveling around, looking for breathing room — about to burst as a stream of liquid fire flows through him, making him feel nauseous.

He is forced to hear a symphony of idealized promises, taste immolating kisses, killing him from the inside with previous untold plans, carnal antics, watching an old sweet love go up in flames. Sparks splatter over him, disturbingly, distinctly, acutely into his skin; he might as well be lying on the gravel on Mustafar since these are burns he should only feel when he's dying. Why did he have to feel everything so viscerally?

A blazing spasm, speared by short circuits and pictures... Too many insufferable pictures devour his mind.

Palo in my apartment. In my bed. Laughing with her in between the sheets. Getting to trail a finger down her soft skin, running like a tributary in between her breasts, the parts of her unseen to the public... A hidden treasure. Does he study the senses when his tongue tastes her? Does she scratch her nails down his back? Does she scream his name instead of mine? Where does he put his hands? Does she move for him the way she moves for me?

Anakin's head is split, sadistic, fiendish — he is unable to seek shelter on either side. For all the pain he has inflicted, none was ever as cruel as what he inflicted upon himself. He must torture himself; his mind must run through every miserable realm of hate and envy.

And suddenly all his plans went out the window as he felt this radical shift, an identity crisis. He's the helpless slave turned chosen one. The passionate lover turned selfless Jedi. Giving up a chance to control his impulsivity, to learn not to swing from his immoderate patterns of idealizing and devaluing people based on what he gains from them — all the hard work and effort he put into it seemed futile. Now he felt insignificant again, terrified of his proclivity to repel others and ascertain that he will be abandoned.

And he knows he *can* elude the weaving of himself in these irrational states of overanalyzing with his tremendous cognitive abilities. But he is going to forgo the positives of his capabilities for the sake of his paranoia, his needs. His potential is as high functioning

as his most primal instincts, and he keeps leaving the former out with the waste in favour of his most natural urges.

At the crux of his issues is his ability to make abandonment virtually a certainty because no matter how hard he tries, he has yet to channel his darkest traits into a production of light. Without the father figure to encourage discipline, the healthy balance of masculinity—the ability to control, channel, and manage his aggression—he will continue to fall victim to his own recklessness.

His eyes finally land on Palo, studying him with precise, predatory, and unwavering attention. His breathing was sharp sounds of adrenaline, steady, strong, and rising with concentration.

*The nerve. The **nerve** of him thinking he can take my place inside her—*

—Anakin’s fist meets Palo in between the eyes. Palo falls a step back, shocked by the sudden attack as he cradles his now bleeding nose. But there’s no slowing down for Anakin who had lapsed into self-absorption, throwing another punch, knocking Palo to the floor. Palo’s ears are ringing so loud, he can’t see straight, while Anakin hovers over him in a state of obscenity. Anakin is determined to conquer his anxieties, taking them all out on the man who should never have touched his wife. Punch and after punch, the background sounds, the surroundings are in the distance — they are so far away that Anakin’s mind goes blank, even *he* isn’t present. Padme’s screams are no more memorable than the faded howls of the wind.

It is only when Padme tries to pull him off Palo and is met with the vicious shove of Anakin’s arm that Anakin snaps out of his irrepressible rage. His exigencies and impulsions are slowed down, and the wails of Padme along with the background noise are back in full force — like someone had increased the volume he had shut off in his head.

He looks from an unconscious Palo to a frightened and injured Padme, cradling her baby bump with blood leaking down her thigh. Her eyes shiny with tears and panic struck across her face. His vision narrows in on his metal hand that had smashed Palo’s face in. His eyes sink into the sockets, his breaths shallow and irregular, and his body heavy as he grabbles with the emotional shock.

He realizes if he hadn’t stopped himself, no one could’ve. He feels the rough grips of security guards dragging him off Palo — unforgiving and unrelenting in their manhandling of him, and he knew they were all disgusted and perhaps feeling a little incompetent as they would’ve needed him to surrender anyway in order to arrest him.

He doesn’t bother to fight back. He just wanted the ground to swallow him up. “Get me out of here! Phren!” Anakin growls up at the ceiling in desperation as he is taken away from the scene. “PHREN!”

*You touched my heart, you touched my soul
You changed my life and all my goals
I’ve kissed your lips and held your hand
Shared your dreams and shared your bed*

*I know you well, I know your smell
I've been addicted to you*

With his back slouched against the bed's headboard, Phren exhaled with a hint of boredom. "That went well."

Vader was knelt down shaking his head with his hand leaning on his knee, engulfed by profuse tremors. "I can't. I can't live in a world where she's carrying another man's child."

Phren pauses, softening at the sight of Vader's overwhelming instability. "...I understand. It's difficult to be happy. It requires effort, discipline. . .and, most of all, it requires awareness. It's the little things, Lord Vader. They are what make up each day; they ultimately create happiness. It's your mother telling you she's proud of you; it's the way your wife greets you at the door when you come home; it's the respect and love of a brother. What it is *not*, is power."

Phren stretches his arms at his sides on the mattress, straightening his posture. "You can keep searching for a way to have it all, to put your needs above everyone else's. But you'll never truly appreciate what you have if you're always looking for what you can get. It is only after we've tasted the bitterness of life that we can appreciate its sweetness."

*I am a dreamer and when I wake
You can't break my spirit — it's my dreams you take
And as you move on, remember me
Remember us and all we used to be*

*I'd be the father of your child
I'd spend a lifetime with you
I know your fears and you know mine
We've had our doubts but now we're fine
And I love you, I swear that's true
I cannot live without you*

Goodbye My Lover — James Blunt

6. Bitter Sweet Symphony

Bittersweet

*Well I've never prayed but tonight I'm on my knees
I need to hear some sounds that recognize the pain in me
I let the melody shine, let it cleanse my mind, I feel free now
But the airwaves are clean and there's nobody singing to me now*

Phren was led to Darth Vader's chamber by two prison guards. He held the crystal bowl in his handcuffed hands. Vader was staring out the window, looking at the stars, thinking about his latest adventure, his unbridled passion, and how it seemed to be more of a hindrance than a help these days. Forget the foundations he laid out, he was bound to destroy it all now.

"You wanted to see me?" Phren began once the guards dropped him off and closed the door on their way out.

Vader didn't look back at him; his eyes remained firmly on the view out the window. "I always thought I was the only one who could make her happy. Thought I knew best." So *many sacrifices*, he thought. . .*and none had paid off*. "But life has humbled me."

The Dark Lord finally turned to face the philosopher who stood there in his white prison uniform with orange patches on the sleeves. Phren's once jet black hair now had streaks of silver in it. Vader headed towards him with patient, calm footsteps.

"You once said, it's not *where* I go on this journey, it's *who* goes." He spoke, now inches away from Phren. Vader looked down at the crystal bowl in the prisoner's hands. "And if I was the man who deserved it, I wouldn't go... I wouldn't have done this."

Phren did his best to peer into Vader's dark lenses. For a man who constantly wrestled with his own mind, Vader had gotten very good at masking his fears, his trauma, doubts, dependence, and weaknesses under a mighty exterior. Or perhaps, he was stabilizing after all.

The Dark Lord reached over and unlocked Phren's handcuffs. The metal constraints made a clanking sound as they fell to the floor.

"You're free to go." Vader rasped.

Phren glanced at the handcuffs on the floor and back up to the Sith. The crystal bowl in his hands started to shimmer with potential as blue waves appeared at the bottom, capturing Vader's attention.

Phren didn't take his eyes off Vader's helmet, knowing the tall, dark figure was perplexed under the mask. He had to admit he admired Vader's devotion, even to the wrong things. The Sith was loyal to a fault. But, for a man who went from barely controlling his emotions to

burying them deep down, it was impressive to watch Vader learn to dig them up again with a more controlled progression, an achievement... *An acceptance — a balance.*

“The pendulum has to swing both ways. . .then it finds peace in the middle.” The corners of Phren’s mouth turned upwards. “Let’s go for a walk.”

Vader looked around at his new surroundings while Phren took casual steps behind him. It was clear that Phren was enjoying the fresh air after being locked in a prison cell all this time.

“I know this place.” Vader uttered as his eyes traveled over the gardens, the freshly cut green grass, and yellow flowers.

He turned back to Phren who nodded for him to look in a certain direction, and Vader saw the woman ahead. She stood there in a velvet cloak with a neat twin bun hairstyle.

And Darth Vader felt that he had found his place in the cosmos.

“Padme,” Vader breathed out, striding over to her. Each step felt like returning home, planting relief and contentment into the ground which was supplied back to him through his toes. He now stands before her, his fingers caress her soft cheek and he appreciates the erotic response at the tip of his fingers as they trail down her lips, chin, and neck — getting to rediscover her, explore what was lost in imagination. A vivid gesture is felt through his leather gloves and it all becomes clear — if he could feel, then he wasn’t Vader under the mask.

He removed his helmet and had returned to his twenty-two year old self. He couldn’t take his idyllic, watery blue eyes off her and her dazzling, fresh-faced smile. She was a never-ending beauty, a beauty that erases your anxieties with one look into those big brown eyes, full of magic, and all the sensationalized mystery that once haunted him now made sense. It’s all about her.

He takes a slow breath, one of acceptance. Bitterness evaporates, unveiling clarity as he takes responsibility. “When I left the council chamber. . .that’s when I lost you,” he realizes, tilting his head to one side to gaze at the elegant face looking back at him. “And I’m sorry.”

“I know,” Her melodic tone grants him much needed peace. She lifts a hand to cup the side of his face. “You’ve already apologized. . .with your eyes.”

Her words curved his mouth, allowing him to release some of his guilt as he gets lost in the charm of her mesmerizing eyes, pronounced cheekbones, and heavenly lips that all perfectly line up together to structure her alluring face. He could stare at her forever.

He drawls, “I love you.”

Anakin cradles her face, and nothing refills him with pleasure faster than getting to hold her in the palm of his hands. His thumbs stroke her cheeks, wanting to be devoured whole by the awakening of love, art, poetry — what it really means to feel alive — all which exist only when he touches her. He never wanted to forget this feeling. He hoped it would remain on his fingertips like muscle memory.

"I know that too." She shoots him another brilliant smile. That smile, again. It dissolves darkness, that smile.

She seems equally as moved as she revels in getting to look into his bright blue eyes as his face glows with love.

His fingers slip under her hair strands that were tightly pulled in side buns. His clear eyes scan every part of her delicate facial features, admiring her fully, taking it all in like it was the last memory.

"If I could, I'd choose you in every life." His eyes start to well up with tears. But, he exhales, doing his best to be strong. His voice gets caught in his throat as he reluctantly lets the words out. "But I have to let go now."

A tear falls down his cheek as he stares into her kind eyes. Padme wipes away his tears with her gentle thumb and he closes his eyes in response, forever in debt to her unconditional, unwavering love, forgiveness, and warm hands. This woman had changed his life, saved him in many ways. And yet here she was again, still loving him through it all.

She lifts herself up on her tip-toes to press her lips against his, and he melts from the sweetness of her mouth. Her fingers entwine in his hair she deepens the kiss. It was overwhelming, the stimulation, the touch of her fingers in his hair, the taste of her tongue after all this time. He soaks it all up, every liberating feeling is channeled through her kiss. His spirit is reborn.

And it all comes flashing back to him — his life with Padme, however short, was an adventure, a wonder. Her love was compassionate, contagious, and full of hope. Never greedy, always light, giving, and gentle — a continuum. She bridges the profound and the simple, reminding him that fear is created in the mind; it's never as bad as it seems in the moment. Hope really is timeless. Hope is brave. Hope always finds a way.

His hands that were cupping the sides of her face now sink to cradle her neck, never wanting to let go. His forehead rests on hers as he closes his eyes and basks in the loving arms of his angel. Restless inhalations leave his mouth as his parted lips breathe her in, wanting to keeping her close.

"I'll find you again." She whispers into his mouth as the tip of his nose brushes the tip of hers. "Just be present, and you'll know. . .you'll know it's me."

His lips brush against hers lightly for a second, unable to resist, getting one soft final kiss.

Anakin feels her moving away. His fingers are forced to slip off her neck, brushing past her collar bone as she fades away into the wind — but not before he hears the echoes of her soul painting in the air. Her voice travels away as she sings out, "I love you."

And hearing those three words helps him accept the goodbye, find peace, and *let go*.

Once she disappears completely, Anakin looks around the gardens. His head swivels from side to side, watching the greenery fizzle out and his surroundings morph into his dark chamber.

Darth Vader feels his scars returning on his face and along his body once he is back in his cold, dark castle. He presses a hand against the mask on his face, realizing reality had conquered dreams. It was time to live a real life. A flawed life. A true life. He then looks around and studies his chamber, knowing it was going to be difficult. Perhaps he just needed a small period of time to mourn.

But there was no time to dwell on a dead dream. A man approached the door, pulling him out of his thoughts. “Lord Vader,”

Vader shakes his head — saying through gritted teeth, “Not now, Boba.”

“I have some information—”

“—I said not now.” A frustrated Vader huffed while Phren leaned against the wall, watching them both.

“It’s about the boy — the rebel fighter pilot.” Boba Fett announced and Vader had half a mind to slam the door shut with the force to quieten the outside interruption, dying to wallow in his memories for a little while longer. But Boba was insistent. “I got his name... Skywalker.”

Vader’s body froze. His mind was trying to grabble with what he had just heard. He had to make sense of it; there’s no room for fear, second thoughts, or confusion. This was a moment. A moment of truth. A sign. A synchronicity. This was no coincidence.

His eyes dart from the bounty hunter to Phren as his eyes widen under the mask with shock — and then clarity.

Phren smiles at him with encouragement. “Be present. . .and you’ll know.” He makes his way over to Vader and pats him on the back. “It’s in the little things that we can turn it all around.”

Consumed by all the information, Vader lowers his head as if to work out the mathematics —or allow the relief to sink in. Phren never spoke words devoid of meaning. He knew how to offer the right message at the right time — when you’ll understand it. He gives you pieces of the puzzle over time and then finally lands you the last one when he knows you don’t need him anymore.

Phren heads to Boba by the door and once he arrives, he takes one last look at the Dark Lord. “Oh and Lord Vader?”

Vader looks back at him as Phren’s voice provides an escape from the swarming wanders of his contagious thoughts, bringing him back to reality. Again.

“After the bitterness, the sweet is that much sweeter.” Phren gestures a nod — one of friendship, respect. He then signals for Boba to walk out with him and let Vader reflect in peace.

Darth Vader watches as they leave until he shifts his focus on the glaring truth. He feels his soul cleanse as he whispers,

“Skywalker.”

And a smile graces his lips because, while he can't change the past, he finally got the future to smile back.

*'Cause it's a bitter sweet symphony — that's life
Trying to make ends meet, you're a slave to power then you die
I'll take you down the only road I've ever been down
You know the one that takes you to the places
Where all the veins meet, yeah*

*You know I can change, I can change
I can change, I can change
But I'm here in my mould
I am here in my mould
And I'm a million different people from one day to the next
I can't change my mould, no, no, no, no, no*

Bitter Sweet Symphony — The Verve